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E N Q U I R Y

CONCERNING

POLITICAL JUSTICE.



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ENQUIRY  
CONCERNING  
POLITICAL JUSTICE,  
AND  
ITS INFLUENCE  
ON  
MORALS AND HAPPINESS.

BY  
WILLIAM GODWIN.

THE THIRD EDITION CORRECTED.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. G. AND J. ROBINSON,  
PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1798.





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VOLUME

I & A.D. 1793

PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAULS CHURCH-YARD

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## P R E F A C E.

**F**EW works of literature are held to be of more general use, than those which treat in a methodical and elementary way of the principles of science. But the human mind in every enlightened age is progressive; and the best elementary treatises, after a certain time, are reduced in value by the operation of subsequent discoveries. Hence it has always been desired by the intelligent, that new works of this kind should from time to time be brought forward, including the improvements, which had not yet been realised when former compilations upon the subject were produced.

It would be strange if something of this kind were not requisite in the science of politics, after the concussion that the minds of men have suffered upon this subject, and the materials that have been furnished, by the recent experiments of America and France. A sense of the value of such a work, if pro-



perly executed, was the motive which gave birth to these volumes.

Authors who have formed the design of supplying the defects of their predecessors, will be found, if they were in any degree equal to the task, not merely to have collected the scattered information that had been produced upon the subject, but to have enlarged the science by the effect of their own meditations. In the following work principles will occasionally occur, which it will not be just to reject without examination, upon the ground of their apparent novelty. It was impossible perseveringly to reflect upon so comprehensive a science, and a science which may be said to be yet in its infancy, without being led into ways of thinking that were in some degree uncommon.

Another argument in favour of the utility of such a work, was frequently in the author's mind, and therefore ought to be mentioned. He conceived politics to be the proper vehicle of a liberal morality. That description of ethics will be found perhaps to be worthy of slight estimation, which confines itself to petty detail and the offices of private life, instead of designing the combined and simultaneous



taneous improvement of communities and nations. But, if individual correction ought not to be the grand purpose of ethics, neither ought it by any means to be overlooked. It appeared sufficiently practicable to make of such a treatise, exclusively of its direct political use, an advantageous vehicle for this subordinate purpose. The author was accordingly desirous of producing a work from the perusal of which no man should rise, without being strengthened in habits of sincerity, fortitude and justice.

Having stated the considerations in which the work originated, it is proper to mention a few circumstances of the outline of its history. It was projected in the month of May 1791: the composition was begun in the following September, and has therefore occupied a space of sixteen months. This period was for the most part devoted to the purpose with unusual ardour. It were to be wished it had been longer; but the state of the public mind and of the general interests of the species, operated as a strong argument in favour of an early publication.

The printing of the following treatise, as well as the composition, was influenced by the



same principle, a desire to reconcile a certain degree of dispatch with the necessary deliberation. The printing was for that reason commenced, long before the composition was finished. Some disadvantages have arisen from this circumstance. The ideas of the author became more perspicuous and digested, as his enquiries advanced. The longer he considered the subject, the more clearly he seemed to understand it. This circumstance has led him into some inaccuracies of language and reasoning, particularly in the earlier part of the work, respecting the properties and utility of government. He did not enter upon the subject, without being aware that government by its very nature counteracts the improvement of individual intellect; but, as the views he entertains in this particular are out of the common road, it is scarcely to be wondered at, that he understood the proposition more completely as he proceeded, and saw more distinctly into the nature of the remedy. This defect, together with some others, might, under a different mode of preparation, have been avoided. The judicious reader will make a suitable allowance. The author judges upon a review, that the errors are not  
such



such as essentially to affect the object of the work, and that more has been gained than lost by the conduct he has pursued\*.

In addition to what is here stated it may not be useless to describe the progress by which the author's mind was led to its present sentiments. They are not the suggestions of any sudden effervescence of fancy. Political enquiry had long held a considerable place in the writer's attention. It is now twelve years since he became satisfied, that monarchy was a species of government essentially corrupt. He owed this conviction to the political writings of Swift and to a perusal of the Latin historians. Nearly at the same time he derived much additional stimulus from several French productions on the nature of man, which fell into his hands in the following order, the *Système de la Nature*, the works of Rousseau, and those of Helvetius. Long before he projected the present work, his mind had been familiarised to several of the speculations suggested in it

\* The defects here alluded to, have been attempted to be rectified in the second edition. It is impossible perhaps so to improve a crude and unequal performance, as to remove every vestige of its original blemish.

respecting



respecting justice, gratitude, the rights of man, promises, oaths, and the omnipotence of opinion. Of the desirableness of a government in the utmost degree simple he was not persuaded, but in consequence of ideas suggested by the French revolution. To the same event he owes the determination of mind which gave birth to the present work.

The period in which it makes its appearance is singular. The people of England have assiduously been excited to declare their loyalty, and to mark every man as obnoxious who is not ready to sign the Shibboleth of the constitution. Money is raised by voluntary subscription to defray the expence of prosecuting men who shall dare to promulgate heretical opinions, and thus to oppress them at once with the authority of government, and the resentment of individuals. This was an accident unforeseen when the work was undertaken; and it will scarcely be supposed that such an accident could produce any alteration in the writer's designs. Every man, if we may believe the voice of rumour, is to be prosecuted, who shall appeal to the people by the publication of any unconstitutional paper or pamphlet; and it is added,



added, that men are to be punished for any unguarded words that may be dropped in the warmth of conversation and debate \*. It is now to be tried whether, in addition to these alarming encroachments upon our liberty, a book is to fall under the arm of the civil power, which, beside the advantage of having for one of its express objects the dissuading from tumult and violence, is by its very nature an appeal to men of study and reflection. It is to be tried whether an attempt shall be made to suppress the activity of mind, and put an end to the disquisitions of science. Respecting the event in a personal view the author has formed his resolution. Whatever conduct his countrymen may pursue, they will not be able to shake his tranquillity. The duty he conceives himself most bound to discharge, is the assisting the progress of truth; and, if he suffer in any respect for such a proceeding, there is certainly no vicissitude that can befall him, that can ever

\* The first conviction of this kind, which the author was far from imagining to be so near, was of a journeyman tallow-chandler, January 8, 1793, who, being shown the regalia at the Tower, was proved to have vented a coarse expression against royalty to the person that exhibited them.

bring



bring along with it a more satisfactory consolation.

But, exclusively of this precarious and unimportant consideration, it is the fortune of the present work to appear before a public that is panic struck, and impressed with the most dreadful apprehensions respecting such doctrines as are here delivered. All the prejudices of the human mind are in arms against it. This circumstance may appear to be more essential than the other. But it is the property of truth to be fearless, and to prove victorious over every adversary. It requires no great degree of fortitude, to look with indifference upon the false fire of the moment, and to foresee the calm period of reason which will succeed.

LONDON:

JANUARY 7, 1793.

P R E-



# P R E F A C E

TO THE

## SECOND EDITION.

**T**HE reception of the following work has been such as to exceed what the author dared to promise himself. Its principles and reasonings have obtained the attention of the public to a considerable extent. This circumstance he has construed as imposing upon him the duty of a severe and assiduous revision. Every author figures to himself, while writing, a numerous and liberal attention to his lucubrations : if he did not believe that he had something to offer that was worthy of public notice, it is impossible that he should write with any degree of animation. But the most ardent imagination can scarcely be expected to come in competition with sense. In the present instance there are many things that now appear to the author upon a review, not to have been meditated with a sufficiently profound reflection, and to have been too hastily obtruded upon the reader. These things



things have been pruned away with a liberal hand. The wish nearest to his heart is, that there should be nothing in the book unworthy of the cause it was intended to serve. But, though he professes to have done much, much yet remains to be done. After repeated revisals the jealous eye of a man habituated to the detection of errors, still discovers things that might be better. Some are obscure; some are doubtful. As to the last, the author did not conceive himself at liberty to retract any thing without a conviction, or something near a conviction, that he was wrong. He deemed it by no means justifiable to suppress any opinion, because it was inconsistent with the prejudice or persuasion of others. A circumstance by which it was originally intended that this book should be characterised, was a perfect explicitness and unreserve; and even if this intention should at last be an improper one, it was apparently too late to reverse it. It would have been an act incompatible with every pretension to integrity, to have rescinded sentiments originally advanced as true, so long as they stood forward to the author's mind accompanied with their original evidence.

It



It will perhaps be asked by some persons in perusing the present edition, how it has happened that the author has varied in so many points from the propositions advanced in the former? and this variation may even be treated as a topic of censure. To this he has only to answer, in the first place, that the spirit and great outlines of the work, he believes, remain untouched, and that it is reasoned in various particulars with more accuracy from the premises and fundamental positions, than it was before. Secondly, he presumes to ascribe the variations to an industrious and conscientious endeavour to keep his mind awake to correction and improvement. He has in several instances detected error; and, so far is he from feeling mortified at the discovery, that he hopes yet, by such activity and impartiality as he shall be able to exert, to arrive at many truths, of which he has scarcely at present perhaps the slightest presentiment.

Some apology is due to the purchasers of the former edition respecting the variations that appear in this. It was extremely the wish of the author, that the variations should be printed separately for their use. But how was this possible? They grew under his hands; and at last, out of eight books of

2

which



which the work consists, the four first and the last may, without impropriety, be said to be rewritten. An obvious alternative unavoidably offers itself. If the work be of that useless sort with which the press is daily incumbered, these purchasers will not be very solicitous about the variations of such a performance. If on the contrary it be a production of any value, they will probably sympathise with the author. He feels himself particularly indebted to them, for having enabled him to bring the work to its present state of correction ; and it is to be hoped that they will not regret the having been instrumental to that purpose.

The parts of the work in which the most material variations of deduction or statement appear, will be found under the following titles, The Characters of Men Originate in their External Circumstances, The Voluntary Actions of Men Originate in their Opinions, Of Personal Virtue and Duty, Of Rights, Of Promises, Of Obedience, Of Forms of Government \*, Illustrations of Sincerity,

\* The principles delivered on this subject in the last chapter of Book III, are more fully developed in the three first chapters of Book IV.



Of Self-love and Benevolence, Of Good and Evil; Principles of Property, and Of the Supposed Advantages of Luxury. Important explanations are also subjoined on the topics of marriage and longevity, Book VIII, Appendices to Chap. VIII, and IX. To these the author would wish particularly to call the attention of his former readers. Inferior variations are scattered every where, and are impossible to be enumerated.

The Enquiry concerning Political Justice has been treated by some persons as of a seditious and inflammatory nature. This is probably an aspersion. If the political principles in favour of which it is written have no solid foundation, they have little chance to obtain more than a temporary fashion; and the present work is ill calculated to answer a temporary purpose. If on the contrary they be founded in immutable truth, it is highly probable, to say the least, that they will one day gain a decisive ascendancy. In that case, the tendency of such a disquisition, will be to smooth the gradation, and to prepare the enlightened to sympathise with the just claims of the oppressed and the humble. No man can more fervently deprecate scenes of

VOL. I. a commotion



commotion and tumult, than the author of this book; no man would more anxiously avoid the lending his assistance in the most distant manner to animosity and bloodshed; but he persuades himself that, whatever may be the events with which the present crisis of human history shall be distinguished, the effect of his writings, as far as they are in any degree remembered, will be found favourable to the increase and preservation of general kindness and benevolence.

OCTOBER 29, 1795.

#### ADVERTISEMENT.

THE author has not failed to make use of the opportunity afforded him by the third edition, to revise the work throughout. The alterations however that he has made, though numerous, are not of a fundamental nature. Their object has been merely, to remove a few of the crude and juvenile remarks, which, upon consideration, he thought himself able to detect, in the book as it originally stood.

JULY 1797.

CON-



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## SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES

ESTABLISHED AND REASONED UPON IN THE  
FOLLOWING WORK.

*The reader who would form a just estimate of the reasonings of these volumes, cannot perhaps proceed more judiciously, than by examining for himself the truth of these principles, and the support they afford to the various inferences interspersed through the work.*

### I.

THE true object of moral and political disquisition, is pleasure or happiness.

The primary, or earliest, class of human pleasures, is the pleasures of the external senses.

In addition to these, man is susceptible of certain secondary pleasures, as the pleasures of intellectual feeling, the pleasures of sympathy, and the pleasures of self-approbation.

The secondary pleasures are probably more exquisite than the primary :

Or, at least,

The most desirable state of man, is that, in which he has access to all these sources of pleasure, and is in possession of a happiness the most varied and uninterrupted.

This state is a state of high civilisation.



## II.

The most desirable condition of the human species, is a state of society.

The injustice and violence of men in a state of society, produced the demand for government.

Government, as it was forced upon mankind by their vices, so has it commonly been the creature of their ignorance and mistake.

Government was intended to suppress injustice, but it offers new occasions and temptations for the commission of it.

By concentrating the force of the community, it gives occasion to wild projects of calamity, to oppression, despotism, war, and conquest.

By perpetuating and aggravating the inequality of property, it fosters many injurious passions, and excites men to the practice of robbery and fraud.

Government was intended to suppress injustice, but its effect has been to embody and perpetuate it.

## III.

The immediate object of government, is security.

The means employed by government, is restriction, an abridgment of individual independence.

The pleasures of self-approbation, together with the right cultivation of all our pleasures, require individual independence.

Without independence men cannot become either wise, or useful, or happy.

Conse-



Consequently, the most desirable state of mankind, is that which maintains general security, with the smallest incroachment upon individual independence.

## IV.

The true standard of the conduct of one man towards another, is justice.

Justice is a principle which proposes to itself the production of the greatest sum of pleasure or happiness.

Justice requires that I should put myself in the place of an impartial spectator of human concerns, and divest myself of retrospect to my own predilections.

Justice is a rule of the utmost universality, and prescribes a specific mode of proceeding, in all affairs by which the happiness of a human being may be affected.

## V.

Duty is that mode of action, which constitutes the best application of the capacity of the individual, to the general advantage.

Right is the claim of the individual, to his share of the benefit arising from his neighbours' discharge of their several duties.

The claim of the individual, is either to the exertion or the forbearance of his neighbours.

The exertions of men in society should ordinarily be trusted to their discretion; their forbearance,



ance, in certain cases, is a point of more pressing necessity, and is the direct province of political superintendence, or government.

## VI.

The voluntary actions of men are under the direction of their feelings.

Reason is not an independent principle, and has no tendency to excite us to action; in a practical view, it is merely a comparison and balancing of different feelings.

Reason, though it cannot excite us to action, is calculated to regulate our conduct, according to the comparative worth it ascribes to different excitements.

It is to the improvement of reason therefore, that we are to look for the improvement of our social condition.

## VII.

Reason depends for its clearness and strength upon the cultivation of knowledge.

The extent of our progress in the cultivation of knowledge, is unlimited.

Hence it follows,

1. That human inventions, and the modes of social existence, are susceptible of perpetual improvement.
2. That institutions calculated to give perpetuity to any particular mode of thinking, or condition of existence, are pernicious.

## VIII. The



## VIII.

The pleasures of intellectual feeling, and the pleasures of self-approbation, together with the right cultivation of all our pleasures, are connected with soundness of understanding.

Soundness of understanding is inconsistent with prejudice; consequently, as few falsehoods as possible, either speculative or practical, should be fostered among mankind.

Soundness of understanding is connected with freedom of enquiry: consequently, opinion should, as far as public security will admit, be exempted from restraint.

Soundness of understanding is connected with simplicity of manners, and leisure for intellectual cultivation: consequently, a distribution of property extremely unequal, is adverse to the most desirable state of man.



## VIII.

The pleasure of intellectual feeling, and the pleasure of self-approbation, together with the right cultivation of all our powers, are connected with standards of understanding.

Standards of understanding is inconsistent with prejudices: consequently, as few fallacies as possible, and a speculative or practical should be looked a long mankind.

Standards of understanding is connected with the aim of enquiry: consequently, opinion should be as far as possible, and which he can

express in his reasoning.

Standards of understanding is connected with

imagination, and feeling, and intellect.

Standards of understanding is connected with

the cultivation of the powers of the mind.

Standards of understanding is connected with



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# ENQUIRY

CONCERNING

## POLITICAL JUSTICE.

### BOOK I.

OF THE POWERS OF MAN CONSIDERED IN HIS  
SOCIAL CAPACITY.

#### CHAP. I.

##### INTRODUCTION.

*Subject of enquiry—of the first book.—Received ideas  
of political institution.—Propriety of these ideas  
questioned.—Plan of the first book.*

THE object proposed in the following work  
is, an investigation concerning that form of  
public or political society, that system of intercourse  
and reciprocal action, extending beyond the bounds  
of a single family, which shall be found most to  
conduce to the general benefit. How may the  
peculiar and independent operation of each indivi-  
dual in the social state most effectually be preserved?

BOOK I.  
CHAP. I.

Subject of  
enquiry :



BOOK I.  
CHAP. I.

How may the security each man ought to possess, as to his life, and the employment of his faculties according to the dictates of his own understanding, be most certainly defended from invasion? How may the individuals of the human species be made to contribute most substantially to the general improvement and happiness? The enquiry here undertaken has for its object to facilitate the solution of these interesting questions.

of the first  
book.

In entering upon this investigation nothing can be more useful, than to examine into the extent of the influence that is to be ascribed to political institutions; in other words, into the powers of man, as they have modified, or may hereafter modify his social state of existence. Upon this subject there has been considerable difference of opinion.

Received  
ideas of po-  
litical insti-  
tution.

The most usually received hypothesis is that which considers the effects of government or social institutions, whether acting by express regulations or otherwise, as rather of a negative than positive nature. No doubt the purposes for which government was established, are in their strictest sense negative; to maintain us in the possession of certain advantages against the occasional hostility either of domestic or foreign invaders. But does the influence of government stop, at the point for the sake of which mankind were first prevailed on to adopt it?

Those who believe that it does or can stop at this point, necessarily regard it as a matter of subordinate



dinate disquisition, or at most only co-ordinate with several others. They survey man in his individual character, in his domestic connections, and in the pursuits and attachments which his feelings may incline him to adopt. These of course fill the principal part of the picture. These are supposed, by the speculators of whom we now speak, to be in ordinary cases independent of all political systems and establishments. It is only in peculiar emergencies and matters that depart from the accustomed routine of affairs, that they conceive a private individual to have any occasion to remember, or to be in the least affected by the government of his country. If he commit or is supposed to commit any offence against the general welfare, if he find himself called upon to repress the offence of another, or if any danger from foreign hostility threaten the community in which he resides, in these cases and these only is he obliged to recollect that he has a country. These considerations impose upon him the further duty of consulting, even when no immediate danger is nigh, how political liberty may best be maintained, and mal-administration prevented.

Many of the best patriots and most popular writers on the subject of government, appear to have proceeded upon the principles here delineated. They have treated morality and personal happiness as one science, and politics as a different one. But, while they have considered the virtues and plea-



BOOK I.  
CHAP. I.

asures of mankind as essentially independent of civil policy, they have justly remarked, that the security with which the one can be exercised and the other enjoyed, will be decided by the wisdom of our public institutions and the equity with which they are administered; and have earnestly pressed it upon the attention of mankind, not to forget, in the rectitude or happiness of the present moment, those precautions and that “generous plan of power\*,” which may tend to render it impregnable to the stratagems of corruption or the insolence of tyranny†.

Propriety of  
these ideas  
questioned.

But, while we confess ourselves indebted to the labours of these writers, and perhaps still more to the intrepid language and behaviour of these patriots, we are incited to enquire whether the topic which engaged their attention, be not of higher and more extensive importance than they suspected. Perhaps government is, not merely in some cases the defender, and in other the treacherous foe of the domestic virtues. Perhaps it insinuates itself into our personal dispositions, and insensibly communicates its own spirit to our private transactions. Were not the inhabitants of ancient Greece and Rome indebted in some degree to their political

\* Addison : Cato, Act iv.

† These remarks will for the most part apply to the English writers upon politics, from Sydney and Locke to the author of the Rights of Man. The more comprehensive view has been strikingly delineated by Rousseau and Helvetius.



liberties for their excellence in art, and the illustrious theatre they occupy in the moral history of mankind? Are not the governments of modern Europe accountable for the slowness and inconstancy of its literary efforts, and the unworthy selfishness that characterises its inhabitants? Is it not owing to the governments of the East, that that part of the world can scarcely be said to have made any progress in intellect or science?

When scepticism or a spirit of investigation has led us to start these questions, we shall be apt not to stop at them. A wide field of speculation opens itself before us. If government thus insinuate itself in its effects into our most secret retirements, who shall define the extent of its operation? If it be the author of thus much, who shall specify the points from which its influence is excluded? May it not happen, that the grand moral evils that exist in the world, the calamities by which we are so grievously oppressed, are to be traced to political institution as their source, and that their removal is only to be expected from its correction? May it not be found, that the attempt to alter the morals of mankind singly and in detail is an injudicious and futile undertaking; and that the change of their political institutions must keep pace with their advancement in knowledge, if we expect to secure to them a real and permanent improvement? To prove the affirmative of these questions shall be the business of this first book.



BOOK I.  
CHAP. I.Plan of the  
first book.

The method to be pursued for that purpose, shall be, first, to take a concise survey of the evils existing in political society\*; secondly, to show that these evils are to be ascribed to public institutions†; and thirdly, that they are not the inseparable condition of our existence, but admit of removal and remedy‡.

## C H A P. II.

## HISTORY OF POLITICAL SOCIETY.

*War.—Frequency of war—among the ancients—among the moderns—the French—the English.—Causes of war.—Penal laws.—Despotism.—Deduction from the whole.*

## CHAP. II.

THE extent of the influence of political systems will be forcibly illustrated by a concise recollection of the records of political society.

It is an old observation, that the history of mankind is little else than a record of crimes. Society comes recommended to us by its tendency to supply our wants and promote our well being. If we consider the human species, as they were found previously to the existence of political society, it is difficult not to be impressed with emotions of me-

\* Chap. II, III. † Chap. IV. ‡ Chap. V, VI, VII, VIII.



lancholy. But, though the chief purpose of society is to defend us from want and inconvenience, it effects this purpose in a very imperfect degree. We are still liable to casualties, disease, infirmity and death. Famine destroys its thousands, and pestilence its ten thousands. Anguish visits us under every variety of form, and day after day is spent in languor and dissatisfaction. Exquisite pleasure is a guest of very rare approach, and not less short continuance.

But, though the evils that arise to us from the structure of the material universe are neither trivial nor few, yet the history of political society sufficiently shows that man is of all other beings the most formidable enemy to man. Among the various schemes that he has formed to destroy and plague his kind, war is the most terrible. Satiated with petty mischief and the retail of insulated crimes, he rises in this instance to a project that lays nations waste, and thins the population of the world. Man directs the murderous engine against the life of his brother; he invents with indefatigable care refinements in destruction; he proceeds in the midst of gaiety and pomp to the execution of his horrid purpose; whole ranks of sensitive beings, endowed with the most admirable faculties, are mowed down in an instant; they perish by inches in the midst of agony and neglect, lacerated with every variety of method that can give torture to the frame.



BOOK I.  
CHAP. II.

This is indeed a tremendous scene! Are we permitted to console ourselves under the spectacle of its evils, by the rareness with which it occurs, and the forcible reasons that compel men to have recourse to this last appeal of human society? Let us consider it under each of these heads.

Frequency  
of war:

among the  
ancients:

War has hitherto been found the inseparable ally of political institution. The earliest records of time are the annals of conquerors and heroes, a Bacchus, a Sesostris, a Semiramis and a Cyrus. These princes led millions of men under their standard, and ravaged innumerable provinces. A small number only of their forces ever returned to their native homes, the rest having perished by diseases, hardship and misery. The evils they inflicted, and the mortality introduced in the countries against which their expeditions were directed, were certainly not less severe than those which their countrymen suffered.

No sooner does history become more precise, than we are presented with the four great monarchies, that is, with four successful projects, by means of bloodshed, violence and murder, of enslaving mankind. The expeditions of Cambyfes against Egypt, of Darius against the Scythians, and of Xerxes against the Greeks, seem almost to set credibility at defiance by the fatal consequences with which they were attended. The conquests of Alexander cost innumerable lives, and the immortality of Cæsar is computed to have been purchased by



by the death of one million two hundred thousand men.

BOOK I.  
CHAP. II.

Indeed the Romans, by the long duration of their wars, and their inflexible adherence to their purpose, are to be ranked among the foremost destroyers of the human species. Their wars in Italy continued for more than four hundred years, and their contest for supremacy with the Carthaginians two hundred. The Mithridatic war began with a massacre of one hundred and fifty thousand Romans, and in three single actions five hundred thousand men were lost by the Eastern monarch. Sylla, his ferocious conqueror, next turned his arms against his country, and the struggle between him and Marius was attended with proscriptions, butcheries and murders that knew no restraint from humanity or shame. The Romans, at length, suffered the evils they had been so prompt to inflict upon others; and the world was vexed for three hundred years by the irruptions of Goths, Vandals, Ostrogoths, Huns, and innumerable hordes of barbarians.

I forbear to detail the victorious progress of Mahomet and the pious expeditions of Charlemagne. I will not enumerate the crusades against the infidels, the exploits of Tamerlane, Gengiskan and Aurungzebe, or the extensive murders of the Spaniards in the new world. Let us examine Europe, the most civilised and favoured quarter of the world,  
or

among the  
moderns :



BOOK I.  
CHAP. II.

the French;

or even those countries of Europe which are thought the most enlightened.

France was wasted by successive battles during a whole century, for the question of the Salic law, and the claim of the Plantagenets. Scarcely was this contest terminated, before the religious wars broke out, some idea of which we may form from the siege of Rochelle, where, of fifteen thousand persons shut up, eleven thousand perished of hunger and misery; and from the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, in which the numbers assassinated were forty thousand. This quarrel was appeased by Henry the fourth, and succeeded by the thirty years war in Germany for superiority with the house of Austria, and afterwards by the military transactions of Louis the fourteenth.

the English.

In England the war of Cressy and Agincourt only gave place to the civil war of York and Lancaster, and again after an interval to the war of Charles the first and his parliament. No sooner was the constitution settled by the revolution, than we were engaged in a wide field of continental hostilities by king William, the duke of Marlborough, Maria Theresa and the king of Prussia.

Causes of  
war.

And what are in most cases the pretences upon which war is undertaken? What rational man could possibly have given himself the least disturbance, for the sake of choosing whether Henry the sixth or Edward the fourth should have the style of  
king



king of England? What Englishman could reasonably have drawn his sword for the purpose of rendering his country an inferior dependency of France, as it must necessarily have been if the ambition of the Plantagenets had succeeded? What can be more deplorable, than to see us first engage eight years in war rather than suffer the haughty Maria Theresa to live with a diminished sovereignty or in a private station; and then eight years more to support the free-booter who had taken advantage of her helpless condition?

BOOK I.  
CHAP. II.

The usual causes of war are excellently described by Swift. "Sometimes the quarrel between two princes is to decide which of them shall dispossess a third of his dominions, where neither of them pretends to any right. Sometimes one prince quarrels with another, for fear the other should quarrel with him. Sometimes a war is entered upon because the enemy is too strong; and sometimes because he is too weak. Sometimes our neighbours want the things which we have, or have the things which we want; and we both fight, till they take ours, or give us theirs. It is a very justifiable cause of war to invade a country after the people have been wasted by famine, destroyed by pestilence, or embroiled by factions among themselves. It is justifiable to enter into a war against our nearest ally, when one of his towns lies convenient for us, or a territory of land that would render our dominions round and compact. If a prince sends  
forces



BOOK I.  
CHAP. II.

forces into a nation where the people are poor and ignorant, he may lawfully put the half of them to death, and make slaves of the rest, in order to civilise and reduce them from their barbarous way of living. It is a very kingly, honourable and frequent practice, when one prince desires the assistance of another to secure him against an invasion, that the assistant, when he has driven out the invader, should seize on the dominions himself, and kill, imprison or banish the prince he came to relieve\*."

Penal laws.

If we turn from the foreign transactions of states with each other, to the principles of their domestic policy, we shall not find much greater reason to be satisfied. A numerous class of mankind are held down in a state of abject penury, and are continually prompted by disappointment and distress to commit violence upon their more fortunate neighbours. The only mode which is employed to repress this violence, and to maintain the order and peace of society, is punishment. Whips, axes and gibbets, dungeons, chains and racks are the most approved and established methods of persuading men to obedience, and impressing upon their minds the lessons of reason. There are few subjects upon which human ingenuity has been more fully displayed than in inventing instruments of torture. The lash of the whip a thousand times repeated and flagrant on the back of the defenceless victim, the bastinado

\* Gulliver's Travels, Part IV. Ch. V.



on the soles of the feet, the dislocation of limbs, the fracture of bones, the faggot and the stake, the cross, impaling, and the mode of drifting pirates on the Volga, make but a small part of the catalogue. When Damiens, the maniac, was arraigned for his abortive attempt on the life of Louis XV of France, a council of anatomists was summoned, to deliberate how a human being might be destroyed with the longest protracted and most diversified agony. Hundreds of victims are annually sacrificed at the shrine of positive law and political institution.

BOOK I.  
CHAP. II.

Add to this the species of government which prevails over nine tenths of the globe, which is despotism: a government, as Locke justly observes, altogether “vile and miserable,” and “more to be deprecated than anarchy itself\*.”

Despotism.

Certainly every man who takes a dispassionate survey of this picture, will feel himself inclined to pause respecting the necessity of the havoc which is thus made of his species, and to question whether the established methods for protecting mankind against the caprices of each other are the best that

Deduction  
from the  
whole.

\* Locke on Government, Book I. Ch. i. § 1; and Book II. Ch. vii. § 91.

Most of the above arguments may be found much more at large in Burke's Vindication of Natural Society; a treatise, in which the evils of the existing political institutions are displayed with incomparable force of reasoning and lustre of eloquence, while the intention of the author was to show that these evils were to be considered as trivial.



BOOK I.  
CHAP. II.

can be devised. He will be at a loss which of the two to pronounce most worthy of regret, the misery that is inflicted, or the depravity by which it is produced. If this be the unalterable allotment of our nature, the eminence of our rational faculties must be considered as rather an abortion than a substantial benefit; and we shall not fail to lament that, while in some respects we are elevated above the brutes, we are in so many important ones destined for ever to remain their inferiors.

## CHAP. III.

## SPIRIT OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS.

*Robbery and fraud, two great vices in society—originate, 1. in extreme poverty—2. in the ostentation of the rich—3. in their tyranny—rendered permanent—1. by legislation—2. by the administration of law—3. by the manner in which property is distributed.*

## CHAP. III.

ADDITIONAL perspicuity will be communicated to our view of the evils of political society, if we reflect with further and closer attention upon what may be called its interior and domestic history.

Robbery  
and fraud,  
two great  
vices in so-  
ciety.

Two of the greatest abuses relative to the interior policy of nations, which at this time prevail in the world, consist in the irregular transfer of property, either



either first by violence, or secondly by fraud. If among the inhabitants of any country there existed no desire in one individual to possess himself of the substance of another, or no desire so vehement and restless as to prompt him to acquire it by means inconsistent with order and justice, undoubtedly in that country guilt could scarcely be known but by report. If every man could with perfect facility obtain the necessaries of life, and, obtaining them, feel no uneasy craving after its superfluities, temptation would lose its power. Private interest would visibly accord with public good; and civil society become what poetry has feigned of the golden age. Let us enquire into the principles to which these abuses are indebted for their existence.

First then it is to be observed, that, in the most refined states of Europe, the inequality of property has risen to an alarming height. Vast numbers of their inhabitants are deprived of almost every accommodation that can render life tolerable or secure. Their utmost industry scarcely suffices for their support. The women and children lean with an insupportable weight upon the efforts of the man, so that a large family has in the lower orders of life become a proverbial expression for an uncommon degree of poverty and wretchedness. If sickness or some of those casualties which are perpetually incident to an active and laborious life, be added to these burthens, the distress is yet greater.

originate, &  
in extreme  
poverty.



BOOK I.  
CHAP. III.

It seems to be agreed that in England there is less wretchedness and distress than in most of the kingdoms of the continent. In England the poor's rates amount to the sum of two millions sterling per annum. It has been calculated that one person in seven of the inhabitants of this country derives at some period of his life assistance from this fund. If to this we add the persons, who, from pride, a spirit of independence, or the want of a legal settlement, though in equal distress, receive no such assistance, the proportion will be considerably increased.

I lay no stress upon the accuracy of this calculation; the general fact is sufficient to give us an idea of the greatness of the abuse. The consequences that result are placed beyond the reach of contradiction. A perpetual struggle with the evils of poverty, if frequently ineffectual, must necessarily render many of the sufferers desperate. A painful feeling of their oppressed situation will itself deprive them of the power of surmounting it. The superiority of the rich, being thus unmercifully exercised, must inevitably expose them to reprisals; and the poor man will be induced to regard the state of society as a state of war, an unjust combination, not for protecting every man in his rights and securing to him the means of existence, but for engrossing all its advantages to a few favoured individuals, and reserving for the portion of the rest want, dependence and misery.

A second



A second source of those destructive passions by which the peace of society is interrupted, is to be found in the luxury, the pageantry and magnificence, with which enormous wealth is usually accompanied. Human beings are capable of encountering with cheerfulness considerable hardships, when those hardships are impartially shared with the rest of the society, and they are not insulted with the spectacle of indolence and ease in others, no way deserving of greater advantages than themselves. But it is a bitter aggravation of their own calamity, to have the privileges of others forced on their observation, and, while they are perpetually and vainly endeavouring to secure for themselves and their families the poorest conveniences, to find others revelling in the fruits of their labours. This aggravation is assiduously administered to them under most of the political establishments at present in existence. There is a numerous class of individuals, who, though rich, have neither brilliant talents nor sublime virtues; and, however highly they may prize their education, their affability, their superior polish and the elegance of their manners, have a secret consciousness that they possess nothing by which they can so securely assert their pre-eminence and keep their inferiors at a distance, as the splendour of their equipage, the magnificence of their retinue and the sumptuousness of their entertainments. The poor man is struck with this exhibition; he feels his own

BOOK I.  
CHAP. III.

2. in the ostentation of the rich.



BOOK I.  
CHAP. III.

miserics ; he knows how unwearied are his efforts to obtain a slender pittance of this prodigal waste ; and he mistakes opulence for felicity. He cannot persuade himself that an embroidered garment may frequently cover an aching heart.

3. in their  
tyranny :

A third disadvantage that is apt to connect poverty with discontent, consists in the insolence and usurpation of the rich. If the poor man would in other respects compose himself in philosophic indifference, and, conscious that he possesses every thing that is truly honourable to man as fully as his rich neighbour, would look upon the rest as beneath his envy, his neighbour will not permit him to do so. He seems as if he could never be satisfied with his possessions, unless he can make the spectacle of them grating to others ; and that honest self-esteem, by which his inferior might otherwise attain to tranquillity, is rendered the instrument of galling him with oppression and injustice. In many countries justice is avowedly made a subject of solicitation, and the man of the highest rank and most splendid connections almost infallibly carries his cause against the unprotected and friendless. In countries where this shameless practice is not established, justice is frequently a matter of expensive purchase, and the man with the longest purse is proverbially victorious. A consciousness of these facts must be expected to render the rich little cautious of offence in his dealings with the poor, and to inspire him with a temper overbearing,  
dictatorial



dictatorial and tyrannical. Nor does this indirect oppression satisfy his despotism. The rich are in all such countries directly or indirectly the legislators of the state; and of consequence are perpetually reducing oppression into a system, and depriving the poor of that little commonage of nature, which might otherwise still have remained to them.

The opinions of individuals, and of consequence their desires, for desire is nothing but opinion maturing for action, will always be in a great degree regulated by the opinions of the community. But the manners prevailing in many countries are accurately calculated to impress a conviction, that integrity, virtue, understanding and industry are nothing, and that opulence is every thing. Does a man, whose exterior denotes indigence, expect to be well received in society, and especially by those who would be understood to dictate to the rest? Does he find or imagine himself in want of their assistance and favour? He is presently taught that no merit can atone for a mean appearance. The lesson that is read to him is, "Go home; enrich yourself by whatever means; obtain those superfluities which are alone regarded as estimable; and you may then be secure of an amicable reception." Accordingly poverty in such countries is viewed as the greatest of demerits. It is escaped from with an eagerness that has no leisure for the scruples of honesty. It is concealed as the most indelible disgrace. While one man chooses the path of un-

C 2

distinguishing



BOOK I.  
CHAP. III.

distinguishing accumulation, another plunges into expences which are to impose him upon the world as more opulent than he is. He hastens to the reality of that penury, the appearance of which he dreads; and, together with his property, sacrifices the integrity, veracity and character which might have consoled him in his adversity.

rendered  
permanent:

Such are the causes, that, in different degrees under the different governments of the world, prompt mankind openly or secretly to encroach upon the property of each other. Let us consider how far they admit either of remedy or aggravation from political institution. Whatever tends to decrease the injuries attendant upon poverty, decreases at the same time the inordinate desire and the enormous accumulation of wealth. Wealth is not pursued for its own sake, and seldom for the sensual gratifications it can purchase, but for the same reasons that ordinarily prompt men to the acquisition of learning, eloquence and skill, for the love of distinction and the fear of contempt. How few would prize the possession of riches, if they were condemned to enjoy their equipage, their palaces and their entertainments in solitude, with no eye to wonder at their magnificence, and no fordid observer ready to convert that wonder into an adulation of the owner? If admiration were not generally deemed the exclusive property of the rich, and contempt the constant lacquey of poverty, the love of gain would cease to be an universal passion. Let us consider in what respects  
political



political institution is rendered subservient to this passion.

BOOK I.  
CHAP. III.

1. by legis-  
lation :

First then, legislation is in almost every country grossly the favourer of the rich against the poor. Such is the character of the game-laws, by which the industrious rustic is forbidden to destroy the animal that preys upon the hopes of his future subsistence, or to supply himself with the food that unsought thrusts itself in his path. Such was the spirit of the late revenue-laws of France, which in several of their provisions fell exclusively upon the humble and industrious, and exempted from their operation those who were best able to support it. Thus in England the land-tax at this moment produces half a million less than it did a century ago, while the taxes on consumption have experienced an addition of thirteen millions per annum during the same period. This is an attempt, whether effectual or no, to throw the burthen from the rich upon the poor, and as such is an example of the spirit of legislation. Upon the same principle robbery and other offences, which the wealthier part of the community have no temptation to commit, are treated as capital crimes, and attended with the most rigorous, often the most inhuman punishments. The rich are encouraged to associate for the execution of the most partial and oppressive positive laws; monopolies and patents are lavishly dispensed to such as are able to purchase them; while the most vigilant policy is employed



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CHAP. III.

to prevent combinations of the poor to fix the price of labour, and they are deprived of the benefit of that prudence and judgment which would select the scene of their industry.

2. by the  
administra-  
tion of law :

Secondly, the administration of law is not less iniquitous than the spirit in which it is framed. Under the late government of France the office of judge was a matter of purchase, partly by an open price advanced to the crown, and partly by a *secret douceur* paid to the minister. He, who knew best how to manage his market in the retail trade of justice, could afford to purchase the good will of its functions at the highest price. To the client justice was avowedly made an object of personal solicitation; and a powerful friend, a handsome woman, or a proper present, were articles of much greater value, than a good cause. In England the criminal law is administered with greater impartiality so far as regards the trial itself; but the number of capital offences, and of consequence the frequency of pardons, open a wide door to favour and abuse. In causes relating to property the practice of law is arrived at such a pitch as to render its nominal impartiality utterly nugatory. The length of our chancery suits, the multiplied appeals from court to court, the enormous fees of counsel, attornies, secretaries, clerks, the drawing of briefs, bills, replications and rejoinders, and what has sometimes been called the “glorious uncertainty” of the law, render it frequently more  
advisable



advisable to resign a property than to contest it, and particularly exclude the impoverished claimant from the faintest hope of redress.

BOOK I.  
CHAP. III.

Thirdly, the inequality of conditions usually maintained by political institution, is calculated greatly to enhance the imagined excellence of wealth. In the ancient monarchies of the east, and in Turkey at the present day, an eminent station could scarcely fail to excite implicit deference. The timid inhabitant trembled before his superior; and would have thought it little less than blasphemy, to touch the veil drawn by the proud satrap over his inglorious origin. The same principles were extensively prevalent under the feudal system. The vassal, who was regarded as a sort of live stock upon the estate, and knew no appeal from the arbitrary fiat of his lord, would scarcely venture to suspect that he was of the same species. This however constituted an unnatural and violent situation. There is a propensity in man to look further than the outside; and to come with a writ of enquiry into the title of the upstart and the successful. By the operation of these causes the insolence of wealth has been in some degree moderated. Meantime it cannot be pretended that even among ourselves the inequality is not strained, so as to give birth to very unfortunate consequences. If, in the enormous degree in which it prevails in some parts of the world, it wholly debilitate and emasculate the human race, we shall see some reason to believe that, even in

3. by the manner in which property is distributed.



the milder state in which we are accustomed to behold it, it is still pregnant with the most mischievous effects.

## CHAP. IV.\*

THE CHARACTERS OF MEN ORIGINATE IN THEIR  
EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

*Theory of the human mind.—Subject of the present chapter—of the next.—Erroneous opinions refuted.—I. Innate principles.—This hypothesis, 1. superfluous—2. unsatisfactory—3. absurd.—II. Instincts.—Examination of this doctrine—of the arguments by which it has been enforced: from the early actions of infants—from the desire of self-preservation—from self love—from pity.—III. Effects of antenatal impressions and original structure.—Variableness of the characters of men.—Ease with which impressions may be counteracted.—Form of the infant undetermined.—Habits of men and other animals compared.—Inference.—Importance of these speculations.—IV. Reasonings of the present chapter applied.—Three sorts of education—1. accident—2. precept—3. political institution.*

**T**HUS far we have argued from historical facts, and from them have collected a very strong presumptive evidence, that political institutions have

\* In the plan of this work it was originally conceived that it was advisable not to press matters of close and laborious speculation



have a more powerful and extensive influence, than it has been generally the practice to ascribe to them.

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CHAP. IV.

But we can never arrive at precise conceptions relative to this part of the subject, without entering into an analysis of the human mind\*, and endeavouring to ascertain the nature of the causes by which

Theory of  
the human  
mind.

tion in the outset. It appeared as if moral and political philosophy might assume something more than had been usual of a popular form, without deducting from the justness and depth of its investigation. Upon revision however, it was found that the inferences of the First Book had been materially injured, by an overscrupulousness in that point. The fruit of the discovery was this and the following chapter, as they now stand. It is recommended, to the reader who finds himself deterred by their apparent difficulty, to pass on to the remaining divisions of the enquiry.

\* Some persons have of late suggested doubts concerning the propriety of the use of the word mind. An accurate philosophy has led modern enquirers to question the existence of two classes of substances in the universe, to reject the metaphysical denominations of spirit and soul, and even to doubt whether human beings have any satisfactory acquaintance with the properties of matter. The same accuracy, it has been said, ought to teach us to discard the term mind. But this objection seems to be premature. We are indeed wholly uncertain whether the causes of our sensations, heat, colour, hardness and extension [the two former of these properties have been questioned in a very forcible manner by Locke, Hum. Understanding, the two latter by Berkeley and Hume] be in any respect similar to the ideas they produce. We know nothing of the substance or substratum of matter, or of that which is the recipient of thought and perception. We do not even know that the idea annexed to the word substance is correct,



BOOK I.  
CHAP. IV.

Subject of  
the present  
chapter:

of the next.

which its operations are directed. Under this branch of the subject I shall attempt to prove two things; first, that the actions and dispositions of mankind are the offspring of circumstances and events, and not of any original determination that they bring into the world; and, secondly, that the great stream of our voluntary actions essentially depends, not upon the direct and immediate impulses of sense, but upon the decisions of the understanding. If these propositions can be sufficiently established, it will follow that the happiness men are able to attain, is proportioned to the justness of the opinions they take as guides in the pursuit; and it will only remain, for the purpose of applying these premises to the point under consideration, that we should demonstrate the opinions of men to be, for the most part, under the absolute control of political institution.

First, The actions and dispositions of men are not the offspring of any original bias that they bring into the world in favour of one sentiment or correct, or has any counterpart in the reality of existence. But, if there be any one thing that we know more certainly than another, it is the existence of our own thoughts, ideas, perceptions or sensations (by whatever term we may choose to express them), and that they are ordinarily linked together, so as to produce the complex notion of unity or personal identity. Now it is this series of thoughts thus linked together, without considering whether they reside in any or what substratum, that is most aptly expressed by the term mind; and in this sense the term is intended to be used throughout the following work.

character



character rather than another, but flow entirely from the operation of circumstances and events acting upon a faculty of receiving sensible impressions.

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CHAP. IV.

There are three modes in which the human mind has been conceived to be modified, independently of the circumstances which occur to us, and the sensations excited: first, innate principles; secondly, instincts; thirdly, the original differences of our structure, together with the impressions we receive in the womb. Let us examine each of these in their order.

Erroneous  
opinions re-  
futed.

First, innate principles of judgment. Those by whom this doctrine has been maintained, have supposed that there were certain branches of knowledge, and those perhaps of all others the most important, concerning which we felt an irresistible persuasion, at the same time that we were wholly unable to trace them through any channels of external evidence and methodical deduction. They conceived therefore, that they were originally written in our hearts; or perhaps, more properly speaking, that there was a general propensity in the human mind, suggesting them to our reflections, and fastening them upon our conviction. Accordingly, they established the universal consent of mankind as one of the most infallible criterions of fundamental truth. It appeared upon their system, that we were furnished with a sort of sixth sense, the existence of which was not proved to us, like that  
of

I.  
Innate prin-  
ciples.



BOOK I.  
CHAP. IV.

This hypo-  
thesis, i.  
superfluous:

of our other senses, by direct and proper evidence, but from the consideration of certain phenomena in the history of the human mind, which cannot be otherwise accounted for than by the assumption of this hypothesis.

There is an essential deficiency in every speculation of this sort. It turns entirely upon an appeal to our ignorance. Its language is as follows: "You cannot account for certain events from the known laws of the subjects to which they belong; therefore they are not deducible from those laws; therefore you must admit a new principle into the system for the express purpose of accounting for them." But there cannot be a sounder maxim of reasoning, than that which points out to us the error of admitting into our hypotheses unnecessary principles, or referring the phenomena that occur, to remote and extraordinary sources, when they may with equal facility be referred to sources which obviously exist, and the results of which we daily observe. This maxim alone is sufficient to persuade us to reject the doctrine of innate principles. If we consider the infinitely various causes by which the human mind is perceptibly modified, and the different principles, argument, imitation, inclination, early prejudice and imaginary interest, by which opinion is generated, we shall readily perceive, that nothing can be more difficult than to assign any opinion, existing among the human species,



species, and at the same time incapable of being generated by any of these causes and principles.

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CHAP. IV.

A careful enquirer will be strongly inclined to suspect the soundness of opinions, which rest for their support on so ambiguous a foundation as that of innate impression. We cannot reasonably question the existence of facts; that is, we cannot deny the existence of our sensations, or the series in which they occur. We cannot deny the axioms of mathematics; for they exhibit nothing more than a consistent use of words, and affirm of some idea that it is itself and not something else. We can entertain little doubt of the validity of mathematical demonstrations, which appear to be irresistible conclusions deduced from identical propositions. We ascribe a certain value, sometimes greater and sometimes less, to considerations drawn from analogy. But what degree of weight shall we attribute to affirmations which pretend to rest upon none of these grounds? The most preposterous propositions, incapable of any rational defence, have in different ages and countries appealed to this inexplicable authority, and passed for infallible and innate. The enquirer that has no other object than truth, that refuses to be misled, and is determined to proceed only upon just and sufficient evidence, will find little reason to be satisfied with dogmas which rest upon no other foundation, than a pretended necessity impelling the human mind to yield its assent.

2. unsatisfactory:

But



BOOK I.  
CHAP. IV.

3. absurd.

But there is a still more irresistible argument proving to us the absurdity of the supposition of innate principles. Every principle is a proposition: either it affirms, or it denies. Every proposition consists in the connection of at least two distinct ideas, which are affirmed to agree or disagree with each other. It is impossible that the proposition can be innate, unless the ideas to which it relates be also innate. A connection where there is nothing to be connected, a proposition where there is neither subject nor conclusion, is the most incoherent of all suppositions. But nothing can be more incontrovertible, than that we do not bring pre-established ideas into the world with us.

Let the innate principle be, that “virtue is a rule to which we are obliged to conform.” Here are three principal and leading ideas, not to mention subordinate ones, which it is necessary to form, before we can so much as understand the proposition. What is virtue? Previously to our forming an idea corresponding to this general term, it seems necessary that we should have observed the several features by which virtue is distinguished, and the several subordinate articles of right conduct, that taken together, constitute that mass of practical judgments to which we give the denomination of virtue. These are so far from being innate, that the most impartial and laborious enquirers are not yet agreed respecting them. The next idea included in the above proposition, is that  
of



of a rule or standard, a generical measure with which individuals are to be compared, and their conformity or disagreement with which is to determine their value. Lastly, there is the idea of obligation, its nature and source, the obliger and the sanction, the penalty and the reward.

BOOK I.  
CHAP. IV.

Who is there in the present state of scientific improvement, that will believe that this vast chain of perceptions and notions, is something that we bring into the world with us, a mystical magazine, shut up in the human embryo, whose treasures are to be gradually unfolded as circumstances shall require? Who does not perceive, that they are regularly generated in the mind by a series of impressions, and digested and arranged by association and reflection?

But, if we are not endowed with innate principles of judgment, it has nevertheless been supposed by some persons, that we might have instincts to action, leading us to the performance of certain useful and necessary functions, independently of any previous reasoning as to the advantage of these functions. These instincts, like the innate principles of judgment we have already examined, are conceived to be original, a separate endowment annexed to our being, and not any thing that irresistibly flows from the mere faculty of perception and thought, as acted upon by the circumstances, either of our animal frame, or of the external objects, by which we are affected. They are liable therefore

II.  
Instincts.



BOOK I.  
CHAP. IV.

Examina-  
tion of this  
doctrine:

therefore to the same objection as that already urged against innate principles. The system by which they are attempted to be established, is a mere appeal to our ignorance, assuming that we are fully acquainted with all the possible operations of known powers, and imposing upon us an unknown power as indispensable to the accounting for certain phenomena. If we were wholly unable to solve these phenomena, it would yet behove us to be extremely cautious in affirming that known principles and causes are inadequate to their solution. If we are able upon strict and mature investigation to trace the greater part of them to their source, this necessarily adds force to the caution here recommended.

An unknown cause is exceptionable, in the first place, inasmuch as to multiply causes is contrary to the experienced operation of scientific improvement. It is exceptionable, secondly, because its tendency is to break that train of antecedents and consequents, of which the history of the universe is composed. It introduces an action apparently extraneous, instead of imputing the nature of what follows, to the properties of that which preceded. It bars the progress of enquiry by introducing that which is occult, mysterious and incapable of further investigation. It allows nothing to the future advancement of human knowledge; but represents the limits of what is already known, as the limits of human understanding.

Let us review a few of the most common ex-  
amples



amples adduced in favour of human instincts, and examine how far they authorise the conclusion that is attempted to be drawn from them : and first, some of those actions which appear to rise in the most instantaneous and irresistible manner.

A certain irritation of the palm of the hand will produce that contraction of the fingers, which accompanies the action of grasping. This contraction will at first take place unaccompanied with design, the object will be grasped without any intention to retain it, and let go again without thought or observation. After a certain number of repetitions, the nature of the action will be perceived ; it will be performed with a consciousness of its tendency ; and even the hand stretched out upon the approach of any object that is desired. Present to the child, thus far instructed, a lighted candle. The sight of it will produce a pleasurable state of the organs of perception. He will probably stretch out his hand to the flame, and will have no apprehension of the pain of burning, till he has felt the sensation.

of the arguments by which it has been informed :

from the early actions of infants :

At the age of maturity, the eyelids instantaneously close, when any substance, from which danger is apprehended, is advanced towards them ; and this action is so constant, as to be with great difficulty prevented by a grown person, though he should explicitly desire it. In infants there is no such propensity ; and an object may be approached to their organs, however near and however suddenly,



BOOK I.  
CHAP. IV.

denly, without producing this effect. Frowns will be totally indifferent to a child, who has never found them associated with the effects of anger. Fear itself is a species of foresight, and in no case exists till introduced by experience.

from the de-  
sire of self-  
preserva-  
tion :

It has been said, that the desire of self-preservation is innate. I demand what is meant by this desire? Must we not understand by it, a preference of existence to non-existence? Do we prefer any thing but because it is apprehended to be good? It follows, that we cannot prefer existence, previously to our experience of the motives for preference it possesses. Indeed the ideas of life and death are exceedingly complicated, and very tardy in their formation. A child desires pleasure and loaths pain, long before he can have any imagination respecting the 'ceasing to exist.

from self-  
love :

Again, it has been said, that self-love is innate. But there cannot be an error more easy of detection. By the love of self we understand the approbation of pleasure, and dislike of pain: but this is only the faculty of perception under another name. Who ever denied that man was a percipient being? Who ever dreamed that there was a particular instinct necessary to render him percipient?

from pity :

Pity has sometimes been supposed an instance of innate principle; particularly as it seems to arise with greater facility in young persons, and persons of little refinement, than in others. But it was reasonable to expect, that threats and anger, circumstances



cumstances that have been associated with our own sufferings, should excite painful feelings in us in the case of others, independently of any laboured analysis. The cries of distress, the appearance of agony or corporal infliction, irresistibly revive the memory of the pains accompanied by those symptoms in ourselves. Longer experience and observation enable us to separate the calamities of others and our own safety, the existence of pain in one subject and of pleasure or benefit in others, or in the same at a future period, more accurately than we could be expected to do previously to that experience.

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CHAP. IV.

If then it appear that the human mind is unattended either with innate principles or instincts, there are only two remaining circumstances that can be imagined to anticipate the effects of institution, and fix the human character independently of every species of education: these are, the qualities that may be produced in the human mind previously to the era of our birth, and the differences that may result from the different structure of the greater or subtler elements of the animal frame.

III.  
Effects of  
antenatal  
impressions  
and original  
structure.

To objections derived from these sources the answer will be in both cases similar.

First, ideas are to the mind nearly what atoms are to the body. The whole mass is in a perpetual flux; nothing is stable and permanent; after the lapse of a given period not a single particle probably remains the same. Who knows not that in

Variable-  
ness of the  
characters  
of men.



BOOK I.  
CHAP. IV.

the course of a human life the character of the individual frequently undergoes two or three revolutions of its fundamental stamina? The turbulent man will frequently become contemplative, the generous be changed into selfish, and the frank and good-humoured into peevish and morose. How often does it happen that, if we meet our best loved friend after an absence of twenty years, we look in vain in the man before us for the qualities that formerly excited our sympathy, and, instead of the exquisite delight we promised ourselves, reap nothing but disappointment? If it is thus in habits apparently the most rooted, who will be disposed to lay any extraordinary stress upon the impressions which an infant may have received in the womb of his mother?

Ease with  
which im-  
pressions  
may be  
counter-  
acted.

He that considers human life with an attentive eye, will not fail to remark that there is scarcely such a thing in character and principles, as an irremediable error. Persons of narrow and limited views may upon many occasions incline to sit down in despair; but those who are inspired with a genuine energy, will derive new incentives from miscarriage. Has any unfortunate and undesirable impression been made upon the youthful mind? Nothing will be more easy than for a judicious superintendent, provided its nature is understood, and it is undertaken sufficiently early, to remedy and obliterate it. Has a child passed a certain period of existence in ill-judged indulgence and habits of

command



command and caprice? The skilful parent, when the child returns to its paternal roof, knows that this evil is not invincible, and sets himself with an undoubting spirit to the removal of the depravity. It often happens that the very impression, which, if not counteracted, shall decide upon the pursuits and fortune of an entire life, might perhaps under other circumstances be reduced to complete inefficiency in half an hour.

It is in corporeal structure as in intellectual impressions. The first impressions of our infancy are so much upon the surface, that their effects scarcely survive the period of the impression itself. The mature man seldom retains the faintest recollection of the incidents of the two first years of his life. Is it to be supposed that that which has left no trace upon the memory, can be in an eminent degree powerful in its associated effects? Just so in the structure of the animal frame. What is born into the world is an unfinished sketch, without character or decisive feature impressed upon it. In the sequel there is a correspondence between the physiognomy and the intellectual and moral qualities of the mind. But is it not reasonable to suppose that this is produced, by the continual tendency of the mind to modify its material engine in a particular way? There is for the most part no essential difference between the child of the lord and of the porter. Provided he do not come into the world infected with any ruinous distemper, the

Form of the  
infant undetermined.



child of the lord, if changed in the cradle, would scarcely find any greater difficulty than the other, in learning the trade of his foster father, and becoming a carrier of burthens. The muscles of those limbs which are most frequently called into play, are always observed to acquire peculiar flexibility or strength. It is not improbable, if it should be found that the capacity of the scull of a wise man is greater than that of a fool, that this enlargement should be produced by the incessantly repeated action of the intellectual faculties, especially if we recollect of how flexible materials the sculls of infants are composed, and at how early an age persons of eminent intellectual merit acquire some portion of their future characteristics.

In the mean time it would be ridiculous to question the real differences that exist between children at the period of their birth. Hercules and his brother, the robust infant whom scarcely any neglect can destroy, and the infant that is with difficulty reared, are undoubtedly from the moment of parturition very different beings. If each of them could receive an education precisely equal and eminently wise, the child labouring under original disadvantage would be benefited, but the child to whom circumstances had been most favourable in the outset, would always retain his priority. These considerations however do not appear materially to affect the doctrine of the present chapter; and that for the following reasons.

First,



First, education never can be equal. The inequality of external circumstances in two beings whose situations most nearly resemble, is so great as to baffle all power of calculation. In the present state of mankind this is eminently the case. There is no fact more palpable, than that children of all sizes and forms indifferently become wise. It is not the man of great stature or vigorous make that outstrips his fellow in understanding. It is not the man who possesses all the external senses in the highest perfection. It is not the man whose health is most vigorous and invariable. Those moral causes that awaken the mind, that inspire sensibility, imagination and perseverance, are distributed without distinction to the tall or the dwarfish, the graceful or the deformed, the lynx-eyed or the blind. But, if the more obvious distinctions of animal structure appear to have little share in deciding upon their associated varieties of intellect, it is surely in the highest degree unjustifiable to attribute these varieties to such subtle and imperceptible differences, as, being out of our power to assign, are yet gratuitously assumed to account for the most stupendous effects. This mysterious solution is the refuge of indolence or the instrument of imposture, but incompatible with a sober and persevering spirit of investigation.

Secondly, it is sufficient to recollect the nature of moral causes to be satisfied that their efficiency



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is nearly unlimited. The essential differences that are to be found between individual and individual, originate in the opinions they form, and the circumstances by which they are controled. It is impossible to believe that the same moral train would not make nearly the same man. Let us suppose a being to have heard all the arguments and been subject to all the excitements that were ever addressed to any celebrated character. The same arguments, with all their strength and all their weakness, unaccompanied with the smallest addition or variation, and retailed in exactly the same proportions from month to month and year to year, must surely have produced the same opinions. The same excitements, without reservation, whether direct or accidental, must have fixed the same propensities. Whatever science or pursuit was selected by this celebrated character, must be loved by the person respecting whom we are supposing this identity of impressions. In fine, it is impression that makes the man, and, compared with the empire of impression, the mere differences of animal structure are inexpressibly unimportant and powerless.

Habits of  
men and  
other ani-  
mals com-  
pared.

These truths will be brought to our minds with much additional evidence, if we compare in this respect the case of brutes with that of men. Among the inferior animals, breed is a circumstance of considerable importance, and a judicious mixture and preservation in this point is found to be attended with



with the most unequivocal results. But nothing of that kind appears to take place in our own species. A generous blood, a gallant and fearless spirit is by no means propagated from father to son. When a particular appellation is granted, as is usually practised in the existing governments of Europe, to designate the descendants of a magnanimous ancestry, we do not find, even with all the arts of modern education to assist, that such descendants are the legitimate representatives of departed heroism. Whence comes this difference? Probably from the more irresistible operation of moral causes. It is not impossible that among savages those differences would be conspicuous, which with us are annihilated. It is not unlikely that, if men, like brutes, were withheld from the more considerable means of intellectual improvement, if they derived nothing from the discoveries and sagacity of their ancestors, if each individual had to begin absolutely *de novo* in the discipline and arrangement of his ideas, blood or whatever other circumstances distinguish one man from another at the period of his nativity, would produce as memorable effects in man, as they now do in those classes of animals that are deprived of our advantages. Even in the case of brutes, education and care on the part of man seem to be nearly indispensable, if we would not have the foal of the finest racer degenerate to the level of the cart-horse. In plants the peculiarities of soil decide



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decide in a great degree upon the future properties of each. But who would think of forming the character of a human being by the operations of heat and cold, dryness and moisture upon the animal frame? With us moral considerations swallow up the effects of every other accident. Present a pursuit to the mind, convey to it the apprehension of calamity or advantage, excite it by motives of aversion or motives of affection, and the slow and silent influence of material causes perishes like dews at the rising of the sun.

Inference.

The result of these considerations is, that at the moment of birth man has really a certain character, and each man a character different from his fellows. The accidents which pass during the months of percipiency in the womb of the mother, produce a real effect. Various external accidents, unlimited as to the period of their commencement, modify in different ways the elements of the animal frame. Every thing in the universe is linked and united together. No event, however minute and imperceptible, is barren of a train of consequences, however comparatively evanescent those consequences may in some instances be found. If there have been philosophers that have asserted otherwise, and taught that all minds from the period of birth were precisely alike, they have reflected discredit by such an incautious statement upon the truth they proposed to defend.

But, though the original differences of man and  
man



man be arithmetically speaking something, speaking in the way of a general and comprehensive estimate they may be said to be almost nothing. If the early impressions of our childhood may by a skilful observer be as it were obliterated almost as soon as made, how much less can the confused and unpronounced impressions of the womb, be expected to resist the multiplicity of ideas that successively contribute to wear out their traces? If the temper of the man appear in many instances to be totally changed, how can it be supposed that there is any thing permanent and inflexible in the propensities of a new-born infant? and, if not in the character of the disposition, how much less in that of the understanding?

Speak the language of truth and reason to your child, and be under no apprehension for the result. Show him that what you recommend is valuable and desirable, and fear not but he will desire it. Convince his understanding, and you enlist all his powers animal and intellectual in your service. How long has the genius of education been disheartened and unnerved by the pretence that man is born all that it is possible for him to become? How long has the jargon imposed upon the world, which would persuade us that in instructing a man you do not add to, but unfold his stores? The miscarriages of education do not proceed from the boundedness of its powers, but from the mistakes with which it is accompanied. We often inspire  
disgust,

Importance  
of these  
speculations.



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disgust, where we mean to infuse desire. We are wrapped up in ourselves, and do not observe, as we ought, step by step the sensations that pass in the mind of our hearer. We mistake compulsion for persuasion, and delude ourselves into the belief that despotism is the road to the heart.

Education will proceed with a firm step and with genuine lustre, when those who conduct it shall know what a vast field it embraces; when they shall be aware, that the effect, the question whether the pupil shall be a man of perseverance and enterprise or a stupid and inanimate dolt, depends upon the powers of those under whose direction he is placed, and the skill with which those powers shall be applied. Industry will be exerted with tenfold alacrity, when it shall be generally confessed that there are no obstacles to our improvement, which do not yield to the powers of industry. Multitudes will never exert the energy necessary to extraordinary success, till they shall dismiss the prejudices that fetter them, get rid of the chilling system of occult and inexplicable causes, and consider the human mind as an intelligent agent, guided by motives and prospects presented to the understanding, and not by causes of which we have no proper cognisance and can form no calculation.

IV.  
Reasonings  
of the pre-  
sent chapter  
applied.

Apply these considerations to the subject of politics, and they will authorise us to infer, that the excellencies and defects of the human character, are not derived from causes beyond the reach of ingenuity



genuity to modify and correct. If we entertain false views and be involved in pernicious mistakes, this disadvantage is not the offspring of an irresistible destiny. We have been ignorant, we have been hasty, or we have been misled. Remove the causes of this ignorance or this miscalculation, and the effects will cease. Show me in the clearest and most unambiguous manner that a certain mode of proceeding is most reasonable in itself or most conducive to my interest, and I shall infallibly pursue that mode, as long as the views you suggested to me continue present to my mind. The conduct of human beings in every situation is governed, by the judgments they make and the sensations that are communicated to them.

It has appeared that the characters of men are determined in all their most essential circumstances by education. By education in this place I would be understood to convey the most comprehensive sense that can possibly be annexed to that word, including every incident that produces an idea in the mind, and can give birth to a train of reflections. It may be of use for a clearer understanding of the subject we here examine, to consider education under three heads; the education of accident, or those impressions we receive independently of any design on the part of the preceptor; education commonly so called, or the impressions which he intentionally communicates; and political education, or the modification our ideas receive from the form of government

Three sorts  
of educa-  
tion :



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vernment under which we live. In the course of this successive review we shall be enabled in some degree to ascertain the respective influence which is to be attributed to each.

1. accident:

It is not unusual to hear persons dwell with emphasis on the wide difference of the results in two young persons who have been educated together; and this has been produced as a decisive argument in favour of the essential differences we are supposed to bring into the world with us. But this could scarcely have happened but from extreme inattention in the persons who have so argued. Innumerable ideas, or changes in the state of the percipient being, probably occur in every moment of time. How many of these enter into the plan of the preceptor? Two children walk out together. One busies himself in plucking flowers or running after butterflies, the other walks in the hand of their conductor. Two men view a picture. They never see it from the same point of view, and therefore strictly speaking never see the same picture. If they sit down to hear a lecture or any piece of instruction, they never sit down with the same degree of attention, seriousness or good humour. The previous state of mind is different, and therefore the impression received cannot be the same. It has been found in the history of several eminent men, and probably would have been found much oftener, had their juvenile adventures been more accurately recorded, that the most trivial circumstance has sometimes



sometimes furnished the original occasion of awakening the ardour of their minds and determining the bent of their studies.

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It may however reasonably be suspected whether the education of design be not, intrinsically considered, more powerful than the education of accident. If at any time it appear impotent, this is probably owing to mistake in the project. The instructor continually fails in wisdom of contrivance, or conciliation of manner, or both. It may often happen, either from the pedantry of his habits, or the impatience of his temper, that his recommendation shall operate rather as an antidote than an attraction. Preceptors are apt to pique themselves upon disclosing part and concealing part of the truth, upon a sort of common place, cant exhortation to be addressed to youth, which it would be an insult to offer to the understandings of men. But children are not inclined to consider him entirely as their friend, whom they detect in an attempt to impose upon them. Were it otherwise, were we sufficiently frank and sufficiently skilful, did we apply ourselves to excite the sympathy of the young and to gain their confidence, it is not to be believed but that the systematical measures of the preceptor would have a decisive advantage over the desultory influence of accidental impression. Children are a sort of raw material put into our hands, a ductile and yielding substance, which, if we do not ultimately mould in conformity to our wishes, it is because

2. precept :



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because we throw away the power committed to us, by the folly with which we are accustomed to exert it. But there is another error not less decisive. The object we choose is an improper one. Our labour is expended, not in teaching truth, but in teaching falsehood. When that is the case, education is necessarily and happily maimed of half its powers. The success of an attempt to mislead can never be complete. We continually communicate in spite of ourselves the materials of just reasoning; reason is the genuine exercise, and truth the native element of an intellectual nature; it is no wonder therefore, that, with a crude and abortive plan to govern his efforts, the preceptor is perpetually baffled, and the pupil, who has been thus stored with systematic delusions, and partial, obscure, and disfigured truths, should come out any thing rather than that which his instructor intended him.

3. political  
institution.

It remains to be considered what share political institution and forms of government occupy in the education of every human being. Their degree of influence depends upon two essential circumstances.

First, it is nearly impossible to oppose the education of the preceptor, and the education we derive from the forms of government under which we live, to each other; and therefore, however powerful the former of these may be, absolutely considered, it can never enter the lists with the latter upon equal terms. Should any one talk to us of rescuing a young person from the sinister influence  
of



of a corrupt government by the power of education, it will be fair to ask, who is the preceptor by whom this task is to be effected? Is he born in the ordinary mode of generation, or does he descend among us from the skies? Has his character been in no degree modified, by that very influence he undertakes to counteract? It is beyond all controversy, that men who live in a state of equality, or that approaches equality, will be frank, ingenuous and intrepid in their carriage; while those who inhabit where a great disparity of ranks has prevailed, will be distinguished by coldness, irresoluteness, timidity and caution. Will the preceptor in question be altogether superior to these qualities? Which of us is there who utters his thoughts, in the fearless and explicit manner that true wisdom would prescribe? Who, that is sufficiently critical and severe, does not detect himself every hour in some act of falshood or equivocation, that example and early habits have planted too deeply to be eradicated? But the question is not, what extraordinary persons can be found, who may shine illustrious exceptions to the prevailing degeneracy of their neighbours. As long as parents and teachers in general shall fall under the established rule, it is clear that politics and modes of government will educate and infect us all. They poison our minds, before we can resist, or so much as suspect their malignity. Like the barbarous directors of the Eastern seraglios, they deprive us of our virility,



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and fit us for their despicable employment from the cradle. So false is the opinion that has too generally prevailed, that politics is an affair with which ordinary men have little concern.

Secondly, supposing the preceptor had all the qualifications that can reasonably be imputed, let us recollect for a moment what are the influences with which he would have to struggle. Political institution, by the consequences with which it is pregnant, strongly suggests to every one who enters within its sphere, what is the path he should avoid, as well as what he should pursue. Under a government fundamentally erroneous, he will see intrepid virtue proscribed, and a servile and corrupt spirit uniformly encouraged. But morality itself is nothing but a calculation of consequences. What strange confusion will the spectacle of that knavery which is universally practised through all the existing classes of society, produce in the mind? The preceptor cannot go out of the world, or prevent the intercourse of his pupil with human beings of a character different from his own. Attempts of this kind are generally unhappy, stamped with the impression of artifice, intolerance and usurpation. From earliest infancy therefore there will be two principles contending for empire, the peculiar and elevated system of the preceptor, and the groveling views of the great mass of mankind. These will generate confusion, uncertainty and irresolution. At no period of life will the effect correspond to what



what it would have been, if the community were virtuous and wise. But its effect, obscure and imperceptible for a time, may be expected to burst into explosion at the period of puberty. When the pupil first becomes master of his own actions, and chooses his avocations and his associates, he will necessarily be acquainted with many things of which before he had very slender notions. At this time the follies of the world wear their most alluring face. He can scarcely avoid imagining that he has hitherto laboured under some species of delusion. Delusion, when detected, causes him upon whom it was practised to be indignant and restive. The only chance which remains, is that, after a time, he should be recalled and awakened: and against this chance there are the progressive inticements of society; sensuality, ambition, sordid interest, false ridicule, and the incessant decay of that unblemished purity which attended him in his outset. The best that can be expected, is that he should return at last to sobriety and truth, with a mind debilitated and relaxed by repeated errors, and a moral constitution in which the seeds of degeneracy have been deeply and extensively sown.



## CHAP. V.

THE VOLUNTARY ACTIONS OF MEN ORIGINATE  
IN THEIR OPINIONS.

*Prevailing ideas on this subject.—Its importance in the science of politics.—I. Voluntary and involuntary action distinguished.—Inferences.—Opinion of certain religionists on this subject—of certain philosophers.—Conclusion.—II. Self-deception considered—Custom, or habit delineated.—Actions proceeding from this source imperfectly voluntary.—Subtlety of the mind.—Tendency of our progressive improvements.—Application.—III. Comparative powers of sense and reason.—Nature of sensual gratification.—Its evident inferiority.—Objection from the priority of sensible impressions—refuted from analogy—from the progressive power of other impressions—from experience.—Inference.—IV. Vulgar errors.—Meanings of the word passion—1. ardour—2. delusion—3. appetite—of the word nature.—V. Corollaries.—Truth will prevail over error—capable of being adequately communicated—omnipotent.—Vice not incurable.—Perfectibility of man.*

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Prevailing  
ideas on this  
subject.

**I**F, by the reasons already given, we have removed the supposition of any original bias in the mind that is inaccessible to human skill, and shown that  
the



the defects to which we are now subject are not irrevocably entailed upon us, there is another question of no less importance to be decided, before the ground can appear to be sufficiently cleared for political melioration. There is a doctrine, the advocates of which have not been less numerous than those for innate principles and instincts, teaching “that the conduct of human beings in many important particulars is not determined upon any grounds of reasoning and comparison, but by immediate and irresistible impression, in defiance of the conclusions and conviction of the understanding. Man is a compound being,” say the favourers of this hypothesis, “made up of powers of reasoning and powers of sensation. These two principles are in perpetual hostility; and, as reason will in some cases subdue all the allurements of sense, so there are others in which the headlong impulses of sense will for ever defeat the tardy decisions of judgment. He that should attempt to regulate man entirely by his understanding, and supersede the irregular influences of material excitement; or that should imagine it practicable by any process and in any length of time to reduce the human species under the influence of general truth\* ; would

\* Objections have been started to the use of the word truth in this absolute construction, as if it implied in the mind of the writer the notion of something having an independent and separate existence, whereas nothing can be more certain than that



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Its importance in the science of politics.

would show himself profoundly ignorant of some of the first laws of our nature."

This doctrine, which in many cases has passed so current as to be thought scarcely a topic for examination, is highly worthy of a minute analysis. If true, it, no less than the doctrine of innate principles, opposes a bar to the efforts of philanthropy, and the improvement of social institutions. Certain it is, that our prospects of melioration depend upon the progress of enquiry and the general advancement of knowledge. If therefore there be points, and those important ones, in which, so to express myself, knowledge and the thinking principle in man cannot be brought into contact, if, however great be the improvement of his reason, he truth, that is, affirmative and negative propositions, has strictly no existence but in the mind of him who utters or hears it. But these objections seem to have been taken up too hastily. It cannot be denied, that there are some propositions which are believed for a time and afterwards refuted; and others, such as most of the theorems of mathematics, and many of those of natural philosophy, respecting which there is no probability that they ever will be refuted. Every subject of enquiry is susceptible of affirmation and negation; and those propositions concerning it, which describe the real relations of things, may in a certain sense, whether we be or be not aware that they do so, be said to be true. Taken in this sense, truth is immutable. He that speaks of its immutability, does nothing more than predict with greater or less probability, and say, "This is what I believe, and what all reasonable beings, till they shall fall short of me in their degree of information, will continue to believe."

will



will not the less certainly in many cases act in a way irrational and absurd, this consideration must greatly overcloud the prospect of the moral reformer.

There is another consequence that will flow from the vulgarly received doctrine upon this subject. If man be, by the very constitution of his nature, the subject of opinion, and if truth and reason when properly displayed, give us a complete hold upon his choice, then the search of the political enquirer will be much simplified. Then we have only to discover what form of civil society is most conformable to reason, and we may rest assured that, as soon as men shall be persuaded from conviction to adopt that form, they will have acquired to themselves an invaluable benefit. But, if reason be frequently inadequate to its task, if there be an opposite principle in man, resting upon its own ground, and maintaining a separate jurisdiction, the most rational principles of society may be rendered abortive, it may be necessary to call in mere sensible causes to encounter causes of the same nature, folly may be the fittest instrument to effect the purposes of wisdom, and vice to disseminate and establish the public benefit. In that case the salutary prejudices and useful delusions (as they have been called) of aristocracy, the glittering diadem, the magnificent canopy, the ribbands, stars and titles of an illustrious rank, may at last be found the fittest instruments for guiding and alluring to his proper ends the savage, man\*.

\* Book V, Chap: XV.



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Such is the nature of the question to be examined, and such its connection with the enquiry concerning the influence of political institutions.

The more accurately to conceive the topic before us, it is necessary to observe that it relates to the voluntary actions of man.

I.  
Voluntary  
and involun-  
tary ac-  
tion distin-  
guished.

The distinction between voluntary and involuntary action, if properly stated, is exceedingly simple. That action is involuntary, which takes place in us, either without foresight on our part, or contrary to the full bent of our inclinations. Thus, if a child or a person of mature age burst into tears in a manner unexpected or unforeseen by himself, or if he burst into tears, though his pride or any other principle make him exert every effort to restrain them, this action is involuntary. Voluntary action is, where the event is foreseen previously to its occurrence, and the hope or fear of that event forms the excitement, or, as it is most frequently termed, the motive\*, inducing us, if hope be the passion, to endeavour to forward, and, if fear, to endeavour to prevent it. It is this motion, in this manner generated, to which we annex the idea of voluntariness. Let it be observed that the

\* The term motive is applicable in all cases, where the regular operations of inanimate matter are superseded by the interference of intelligence. Whatever sensation or perception in the mind is capable of influencing this interference, is called motive. Motive therefore is applicable to the case of all actions originating in sensation or perception, whether voluntary or involuntary.



word, action, is here used in the sense of natural philosophers, as descriptive of a change taking place in any part of the universe, without entering into the question whether that change be necessary or free.

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Now let us consider what are the inferences that immediately result from the above simple and unquestionable explanation of voluntary action.

Inferences.

‘Voluntary action is accompanied with foresight; the hope or fear of a certain event is its motive.’ But foresight is not an affair of simple and immediate impulse: it implies a series of observations so extensive as to enable us from like antecedents to infer like consequents. Voluntary action is occasioned by the idea of consequences to result. Wine is set before me, and I fill my glass. I do this, either because I foresee that the flavour will be agreeable to my palate, or that its effect will be to produce gaiety and exhilaration, or that my drinking it will prove the kindness and good humour I feel towards the company with which I am engaged. If in any case my action in filling dwindle into mechanical or semi-mechanical, done with little or no adverting of the mind to its performance, it so far becomes an involuntary action. But, if every voluntary action be performed for the sake of its consequences, then in every voluntary action there is comparison and judgment. Every such action proceeds upon the apprehended truth of some proposition. The mind decides “this is good”



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good" or "desirable;" and immediately upon that decision, if accompanied with a persuasion that we are competent to accomplish this good or desirable thing, the limbs proceed to their office. The mind decides "this is better than something else;" either wine and cordials are before me, and I choose the wine rather than the cordials; or the wine only is presented or thought of, and I decide that to take the wine is better than to abstain from it. Thus it appears that in every voluntary action there is preference or choice, which indeed are synonymous terms.

This full elucidation of the nature of voluntary action enables us to proceed a step further. Hence it appears that the voluntary actions of men in all cases originate in their opinions. The actions of men, it will readily be admitted, originate in the state of their minds immediately previous to those actions. Actions therefore which are preceded by a judgment "this is good," or "this is desirable," originate in the state of judgment or opinion upon that subject. It may happen that the opinion may be exceedingly fugitive; it may have been preceded by aversion and followed by remorse; but it was unquestionably the opinion of the mind at the instant in which the action commenced.

Opinions of  
certain reli-  
gionists on  
this subject:

It is by no means uninformative to remark, how those persons, who seem most to have discarded the use of their reason, have frequently fallen by accident, as it were, upon important truths. There has  
been



been a sect of Christians, who taught that the only point which was to determine the future everlasting happiness or misery of mankind was their faith. Being pressed with the shocking immorality of their doctrine, and the cruel and tyrannical character it imputed to the author of the universe, some of the most ingenious of them have explained themselves thus.

“ Man is made up of two parts, his internal sentiments and his external conduct. Between these two there is a close and indissoluble connection; as are his sentiments, so is his conduct. Faith, that faith which alone entitles to salvation, is indeed a man's opinion, but not every opinion he may happen openly to profess, not every opinion, which floats idly in his brain, and is only recollected when he is gravely questioned upon the subject. Faith is the opinion that is always present to the mind, that lives in the memory, or at least infallibly suggests itself, when any article of conduct is considered with which it is materially connected. Faith is that strong, permanent and lively persuasion of the understanding with which no delusive temptations will ever be able successfully to contend. Faith modifies the conduct, gives a new direction to the dispositions, and renders the whole character pure and heavenly. But heavenly dispositions only can fit a man for the enjoyment of heaven. Heaven in reality is not so properly a place, as a state of the mind; and, if a wicked man could be introduced into



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into the society of "faints made perfect," he would be miserable. God therefore, when he requires faith alone as a qualification for heaven, is so far from being arbitrary, that he merely executes the laws of reason, and does the only thing it was possible for him to do."

In this system there are enormous absurdities, but the view it exhibits of the source of voluntary action, sufficiently corresponds with the analysis we have given of the subject.

of certain  
philoso-  
phers.

The author of the Characteristics has illustrated this branch of the nature of man in a very masterly manner. He observes: "There are few who think always consistently, or according to one certain hypothesis upon any subject so abstruse and intricate as the cause of all things, and the œconomy or government of the universe. For it is evident in the case of the most devout people, even by their own confession, that there are times when their faith hardly can support them in the belief of a supreme wisdom; and that they are often tempted to judge disadvantageously of a providence and just administration in the whole.

"That alone therefore is to be called a man's opinion, which is of any other the most habitual to him, and occurs upon most occasions. So that it is hard to pronounce certainly of any man, that he is an atheist; because, unless his whole thoughts are at all seasons and on all occasions steadily bent against all supposition or imagination of design in things,



things, he is no perfect atheist. In the same manner, if a man's thoughts are not at all times steady and resolute against all imagination of chance, fortune, or ill design in things, he is no perfect theist. But, if any one believes more of chance and confusion than of design, he is to be esteemed more an atheist than a theist [this is surely not a very accurate or liberal view of the atheistical system], from that which most predominates, or has the ascendant. And, in case he believes more of the prevalency of an ill designing principle than of a good one, he is rather a demonist, and may be justly so called, from the side to which the balance or his judgment most inclines\*."

From this view of the subject we shall easily be led to perceive, how little the fact of the variable-ness and inconstancy of human conduct, is incompatible with the principle here delivered, that the voluntary actions of men in all cases originate in their opinions. The persuasion that exists in the mind of the drunkard in committing his first act of intoxication, that in so doing he complies with the most cogent and irresistible reasons capable of being assigned upon the subject, may be exceedingly temporary; but it is the clear and unequivocal persuasion of his mind at the moment that he determines upon the action. The thoughts of the murderer will frequently be in a state of the most tempestuous fluctuation; he may make and unmake his diabo-

Conclusion.

\* Characteristics; Treatise IV, B. I, Part i, § 2.



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lical purpose fifty times in an hour; his mind may be torn a thousand ways by terror and fury, malignity and remorse. But, whenever his resolution is formed, it is formed upon the suggestions of the rational faculty; and, when he ultimately works up his mind to the perpetration, he is then most strongly impressed with the superior recommendations of the conduct he pursues. One of the fallacies by which we are most frequently induced to a conduct which our habitual judgment disapproves, is that our attention becomes so engrossed by a particular view of the subject, as wholly to forget, for the moment, those considerations which at other times were accustomed to determine our opinion. In such cases it frequently happens, that the neglected consideration recurs the instant the hurry of action has subsided, and we stand astonished at our own infatuation and folly.

II.  
Self-deception considered.

This reasoning, however clear and irresistible it may appear, is yet exposed to one very striking objection. "According to the ideas here delivered, men always proceed in their voluntary actions upon judgments extant to their understanding. Such judgments must be attended with consciousness; and, were this hypothesis a sound one, nothing could be more easy than for a man in all cases to assign the precise reason that induced him to any particular action. The human mind would then be a very simple machine, always aware of the grounds upon which it proceeded, and self-deception



tion would be impossible. But this statement is completely in opposition to experience and history. Ask a man the reason why he puts on his clothes, why he eats his dinner, or performs any other ordinary action of his life. He immediately hesitates, endeavours to recollect himself, and often assigns a reason the most remote from what the true philosophy of motive would have led us to expect. Nothing is more clear, than that the moving cause of this action was not expressly present to his apprehension at the time he performed it. Self-deception is so far from impossible, that it is one of the most ordinary phenomena with which we are acquainted. Nothing is more usual than for a man to impute his actions to honourable motives, when it is nearly demonstrable that they flowed from some corrupt and contemptible source. On the other hand many persons suppose themselves to be worse, than an impartial spectator will find any good reason to believe them. A penetrating observer will frequently be able to convince his neighbour that upon such an occasion he was actuated by motives very different from what he imagined. Philosophers to this hour dispute whether human beings in their most virtuous exertions, are under the power of disinterested benevolence, or merely of an enlightened self-interest. Here then we are presented, in one or other of these sets of philosophers, with a striking instance of men's acting from motives diametrically opposite to those which they suppose  
to



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habit deli-  
neated.Actions pro-  
ceeding  
from this  
source im-  
perfectly  
voluntary.

to be the guides of their conduct. Self-examination is to a proverb one of the most arduous of those tasks which true virtue imposes. Are not these facts in express contradiction to the doctrine, that the voluntary actions of men in all cases originate in the judgments of the understanding?"

Undoubtedly the facts which have been here enumerated appear to be strictly true. To determine how far they affect the doctrine of the present chapter, it is necessary to return to our analysis of the phenomena of the human mind. Hitherto we have considered the actions of human beings only under two classes, voluntary and involuntary. In strictness however there is a third class, which belongs to neither, yet partakes of the nature of both.

We have already defined voluntary action to be that of which certain consequences, foreseen, and considered either as objects of desire or aversion, are the motive. Foresight and volition are inseparable. But what is foreseen must, by the very terms, be present to the understanding. Every action therefore, so far as it is perfectly voluntary, flows solely from the decision of the judgment. But the actions above cited, such as relate to our garments and our food, are only imperfectly voluntary\*.

\* This distribution is in substance the same as that of Hartley; but is here introduced without any attention to adopt the peculiarities of his phraseology. *Observations on Man, Chap. I. § iii. Prop. 21.*



In respect of volition there appear to be two stages in the history of the human mind. Foresight is the result of experience ; therefore foresight, and by parity of reasoning volition, cannot enter into the earliest actions of a human being. As soon however as the infant perceives the connection between certain attitudes and gestures and the circumstance of receiving suck, for example, he is brought to desire those preliminaries for the sake of that result. Here, so far as relates to volition and the judgment of the understanding, the action is as simple as can well be imagined. Yet, even in this instance, the motive may be said to be complex. Habit, or custom, has its share. This habit is founded in actions originally involuntary and mechanical, and modifies after various methods such of our actions as are voluntary.

But there are habits of a second sort. In proportion as our experience enlarges, the subjects of voluntary action become more numerous. In this state of the human being, he soon comes to perceive a considerable similarity between situation and situation. In consequence he feels inclined to abridge the process of deliberation, and to act today conformably to the determination of yesterday. Thus the understanding fixes for itself resting places, is no longer a novice, and is not at the trouble continually to go back and revise the original reasons which determined it to a course of action. Thus the man acquires habits, from which it is very



difficult to wean him, and which he obeys without being able to assign either to himself or others, any explicit reason for his proceeding. This is the history of prepossession and prejudice.

Let us consider how much there is of voluntary, and how much of involuntary in this species of action. Let the instance be of a man going to church today. He has been accustomed, suppose, to a certain routine of this kind from his childhood. Most undoubtedly then, in performing this function today, his motive does not singly consist of inducements present to his understanding. His feelings are not of the same nature, as those of a man who should be persuaded by a train of reasoning, to perform that function for the first time in his life. His case is partly similar to that of a scholar who has gone through a course of geometry, and who now believes the truth of the propositions upon the testimony of his memory, though the proofs are by no means present to his understanding. Thus the person in question, is partly induced to go to church by reasons which once appeared sufficient to his understanding, and the effects of which remain, though the reasons are now forgotten, or at least are not continually recollected. He goes partly for the sake of decorum, character, and to secure the good will of his neighbours. A part of his inducement also perhaps is, that his parents accustomed him to go to church at first, from the mere force of authority, and that the omission of a habit to which we



we have been formed, is apt to fit awkwardly and uneasily upon the human mind. Thus it happens that a man who should scrupulously examine his own conduct in going to church, would find great difficulty in satisfying his mind as to the precise motive, or proportion contributed by different motives, which maintained his adherence to that practice.

It is probable however that, when he goes to church, he determines that this action is right, proper or expedient, referring for the reasons which prove this rectitude or expediency, to the complex impression which remains in his mind, from the inducements that at different times inclined him to that practice. It is still more reasonable to believe that, when he sets out, there is an express volition, foresight or apprehended motive inducing him to that particular action, and that he proceeds in such a direction, because he knows it leads to the church. Now, so much of this action as proceeds from actually existing foresight and apprehended motive, it is proper to call perfectly voluntary. So much as proceeds upon a motive, out of sight, and the operation of which depends upon habit, is imperfectly voluntary.

This sort of habit however must be admitted to retain something of the nature of voluntariness for two reasons. First, it proceeds upon judgment, or apprehended motives, though the reasons of that judgment be out of sight and forgotten; at the



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time the individual performed the first action of the kind, his proceeding was perfectly voluntary. Secondly, the custom of language authorises us in denominating every action as in some degree voluntary, which a volition, foresight or apprehended motive in contrary direction, might have prevented from taking place.

Subtlety of  
the mind.

Perhaps no action of a man arrived at years of maturity is, in the sense above defined, perfectly voluntary; as there is no demonstration in the higher branches of the mathematics, which contains the whole of its proof within itself, and does not depend upon former propositions, the proofs of which are not present to the mind of the learner. The subtlety of the human mind in this respect is incredible. Many single actions, if carefully analysed and traced to their remotest source, would be found to be the complex result of different motives, to the amount perhaps of some hundreds.

Tendency  
of our pro-  
gressive im-  
provements.

In the mean time it is obvious to remark, that the perfection of the human character consists in approaching as nearly as possible to the perfectly voluntary state. We ought to be upon all occasions prepared to render a reason of our actions. We should remove ourselves to the furthest distance from the state of mere inanimate machines, acted upon by causes of which they have no understanding. We should be cautious of thinking it a sufficient reason for an action, that we are accustomed to perform it, and that we once thought it right.

The



The human understanding has so powerful a tendency to improvement, that it is more than probable that, in many instances, the arguments which once appeared to us sufficient, would upon re-examination appear inadequate and futile. We should therefore subject them to perpetual revival. In our speculative opinions and our practical principles we should never consider the book of enquiry as shut. We should accustom ourselves not to forget the reasons that produced our determination, but be ready upon all occasions clearly to announce and fully to enumerate them.

Having thus explained the nature of human actions, involuntary, imperfectly voluntary, and voluntary, let us consider how far this explanation affects the doctrine of the present chapter. Now it should seem that the great practical political principle remains as entire as ever. Still volition and foresight, in their strict and accurate construction, are inseparable. All the most important occasions of our lives, are capable of being subjected at pleasure to a decision, as nearly as possible, perfectly voluntary. Still it remains true that, when the understanding clearly perceives rectitude, propriety and eligibility to belong to a certain conduct, and so long as it has that perception, that conduct will infallibly be adopted. A perception of truth will inevitably be produced by a clear evidence brought home to the understanding, and the constancy of the perception will be proportioned to the appre-

Applications



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Compara-  
tive powers  
of sense and  
reason.

hended value of the thing perceived. Reason therefore and conviction still appear to be the proper instrument, and the sufficient instrument for regulating the actions of mankind.

Having sufficiently established the principle, that in all cases of volition we act, not from impulse, but opinion, there is a further obstacle to be removed, before this reasoning can be usefully applied to the subject of political melioration. It may be objected, by a person who should admit the force of the above arguments, "that little was gained by this exposition to the cause it was intended to promote. Whether or no the actions of men frequently arise, as some authors have asserted, from immediate impression, it cannot however be denied that the perturbations of sense frequently seduce the judgment, and that the ideas and temporary notions they produce, are too strong for any force that can be brought against them. But, what man is now in this respect, he will always to a certain degree remain. He will always have senses, and, in spite of all the attempts which can be made to mortify them, their pleasures will always be accompanied with irritation and allurements. Hence it appears, that all ideas of vast and extraordinary improvement in man are visionary, that he will always remain in some degree the dupe of illusion, and that reason, and absolute, impartial truth, can never hope to possess him entire."

## Nature of

The first observation that suggests itself upon this  
statement



statement is, that the points already established tend in some degree to set this new question in a clearer light. From them it may be inferred that the contending forces of reason and sense, in the power they exercise over our conduct, at least pass through the same medium, and assume the same form. It is opinion contending with opinion, and judgment with judgment; and this consideration is not unattended with encouragement. When we discourse of the comparative powers of appetite and reason, we speak of those actions, which have the consent of the mind, and partake of the nature of voluntary. The question neither is nor deserves to be, respecting cases where no choice is exerted, and no preference shown. Every man is aware, that the cases, into which volition enters either for a part or the whole, are sufficiently numerous, to decide upon all that is most important in the events of our life. It follows therefore that, in the contention of sense and reason, it cannot be improbable to hope that the opinion which is intrinsically the best founded, shall ultimately prevail.

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sensual gratification.

But let us examine a little minutely these pleasures of sense, the attractions of which are supposed to be so irresistible. In reality they are in no way enabled to maintain their hold upon us, but by means of the adscititious ornaments with which they are assiduously connected. Reduce them to their true nakedness, and they would be generally despised. Where almost is the man, who would

Its evident inferiority.



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fit down with impatient eagerness to the most splendid feast, the most exquisite viands and highly flavoured wines, “taste after taste upheld with kindest change\*,” if he must sit down alone, and it were not relieved and assisted by the more exalted charms of society, conversation and mutual benevolence? Strip the commerce of the sexes of all its attendant circumstances; and the effect would be similar. Tell a man that all women, so far as sense is concerned, are nearly alike. Bid him therefore take a partner without any attention to the symmetry of her person, her vivacity, the voluptuous softness of her temper, the affectionate kindness of her feelings, her imagination or her wit. You would probably instantly convince him that the commerce itself, which by superficial observers is put for the whole, is the least important branch of the complicated consideration to which it belongs. It is probable that he who should form himself with the greatest care upon a system of solitary sensualism, would come at last to a decision not very different from that which Epicurus is said to have adopted, in favour of fresh herbs and water from the spring.

“But let it be confessed that the pleasures of sense are unimportant and trivial. It is next to be asked, whether, trifling as they are, they may not nevertheless possess a delusive and treacherous

\* Milton: Paradise Lost, Book V.

power,



power, by means of which they may often be enabled to overcome every opposition?"

The better to determine this question, let us suppose a man to be engaged in the progressive voluptuousness of the most sensual scene. Here, if ever, we may expect sensation to be triumphant. Passion is in this case in its full career. He impatiently shuts out every consideration that may disturb his enjoyment; moral views and dissuaves can no longer obtrude themselves into his mind; he resigns himself, without power of resistance, to his predominant idea. Alas, in this situation, nothing is so easy as to extinguish his sensuality! Tell him at this moment that his father is dead, that he has lost or gained a considerable sum of money, or even perhaps that his favourite horse is stolen from the meadow, and his whole passion shall be instantly annihilated: So vast is the power which a mere proposition possesses over the mind of man. So conscious are we of the precariousness of the fascination of the senses, that upon such occasions we provide against the slightest interruption. If our little finger ached, we might probably immediately bid adieu to the empire of this supposed almighty power. It is said to be an experiment successfully made by sailors and persons in that class of society, to lay a wager with their comrades that the sexual intercourse shall not take place between them and their bedfellow the ensuing night, and to trust to their veracity for a confession of the event. The only



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only means probably, by which any man ever succeeds in indulging the pleasures of sense, in contradiction to the habitual persuasion of his judgment, is by contriving to forget every thing that can be offered against them. If, notwithstanding all his endeavours, the unwished for idea intrudes, the indulgence instantly becomes impossible. Is it to be supposed that that power of sensual allurements, which must be carefully kept alive, and which the slightest accident overthrows, can be invincible only to the artillery of reason, and that the most irresistible considerations of justice, interest and happiness will never be able habitually to control it?

To consider the subject in another point of view. It seems to be a strange absurdity, to hear men assert, that the attractions of sensual pleasure are irresistible, in contradiction to the multiplied experience of all ages and countries. Are all good stories of our nature false? Did no man ever resist temptation? On the contrary, have not all the considerations which have power over our hopes, our fears, or our weaknesses been, in competition with a firm and manly virtue, employed in vain? But what has been done, may be done again. What has been done by individuals, cannot be impossible, in a widely different state of society, to be done by the whole species.

Objection  
from the  
priority of  
sensible im-  
pressions :

The system we are here combating, of the irresistible power of sensual allurements, has been numerously supported, and a variety of arguments has been



been adduced in its behalf. Among other things it has been remarked, “that, as the human mind has no innate and original principles, so all the information it has, is derived from sensation; and every thing that passes within it, is either direct impression upon our external organs, or the substance of such impressions modified and refined through certain intellectual strainers and alembics. It is therefore reasonable to conclude, that the original substance should be most powerful in its properties, and the pleasures of external sense more genuine than any other pleasure. Every sensation is, by its very nature, accompanied with the idea of pleasure or pain in a vigorous or feeble degree. The only thing which can or ought to excite desire, is happiness or agreeable sensation. It is impossible that the hand can be stretched out to obtain any thing, except so far as it is considered as desirable; and to be desirable is the same thing as to have a tendency to communicate pleasure. Thus, after all the complexities of philosophy, we are brought back to this simple and irresistible proposition, that man is an animal purely sensual. Hence it follows, that in all his transactions much must depend upon immediate impression, and little is to be attributed to the generalities of ratiocination.”

All the premises in the objection here stated are unquestionably true. Man is just such an animal as the objection describes. Every thing within him that has a tendency to voluntary action, is an affair of

refuted  
from ana-  
logy :



of external or internal sense, and has relation to pleasure or pain. But it does not follow from hence, that the pleasures of our external organs, are more exquisite than any other pleasures. It is by no means unexampled for the result of a combination of materials to be more excellent than the materials themselves. Let us consider the materials by means of which an admirable poem, or, if you will, the author of an admirable poem, is constructed, and we shall immediately acknowledge this to be the case. In reality the pleasures of a savage, or, which is much the same thing, of a brute, are feeble indeed compared with those of the man of civilisation and refinement. Our sensual pleasures, commonly so called, would be almost universally despised, had we not the art to combine them with the pleasures of intellect and cultivation. No man ever performed an act of exalted benevolence, without having sufficient reason to know, at least so long as the sensation was present to his mind, that all the gratifications of appetite were contemptible in the comparison. That which gives the last zest to our enjoyments, is the approbation of our own minds, the consciousness that the exertion we have made, was such as was called for by impartial justice and reason; and this consciousness will be clear and satisfying in proportion as our decision in that respect is unmixed with error. Our perceptions can never be so luminous and accurate in the belief of falsehood as of truth.

The



from the  
progressive  
power of  
other im-  
pressions:

The great advantage possessed by the allurements of sense is, "that the ideas suggested by them are definite and precise, while those which deal in generalities are apt to be faint and obscure. The difference is like that between things absent and present; of the recommendations possessed by the latter we have a more vivid perception, and seem to have a better assurance of the probability of their attainment. These circumstances must necessarily, in the comparison instituted by the mind in all similar cases, to a certain degree incline the balance towards that side. Add to which, that what is present forces itself upon our attention, while that which is absent, depends for its recurrence upon the capriciousness of memory."

But these advantages are seen upon the very face of them to be of a precarious nature. If my ideas of virtue, benevolence and justice, or whatever it is that ought to restrain me from an improper leaning to the pleasures of sense, be now less definite and precise, they may be gradually and unlimitedly improved. If I do not now sufficiently perceive all the recommendations they possess, and their clear superiority over the allurements of sense, there is surely no natural impossibility in my being made to understand a distinct proposition, or in my being fully convinced by an unanswerable argument. As to recollection, that is certainly a faculty of the mind which is capable of improvement; and the point, of which I have been once intimately convinced



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from experience.

vinced and have had a lively and profound impression, will not easily be forgotten when the period of action shall arrive.

It has been said "that a rainy day will frequently convert a man of valour into a coward." If that should be the case, there is no presumption in affirming that his courage was produced by very slight and inadequate motives. How long would a sensation of this kind be able to hold out against the idea of the benefits to arise from his valour, safety to his family and children, defeat to an unjust and formidable assailant, and freedom and felicity to be secured to his country? In reality, the atmosphere, instead of considerably affecting the mass of mankind, affects in an eminent degree only a small part of that mass. The majority are either above or below it; are either too gross to feel strongly these minute variations, or too busy to attend to them. The case is to a considerable degree the same with the rest of our animal sensations. "Indigestion," it has been said, "perhaps a fit of the tooth ach, renders a man incapable of strong thinking and spirited exertion." How far would they be able to maintain their ground against an unexpected piece of intelligence of the most delightful nature?

Pain is probably more formidable in its attacks upon us, and more exquisitely felt than any species of bodily pleasure. Yet all history affords us examples, where pain has been contemned and defied by the energies of intellectual resolution. Do we  
not



not read of Mutius Scævola who suffered his hand to be destroyed by fire without betraying any symptom of emotion, and archbishop Cranmer who endured the same trial two hundred years ago in our own country? Is it not recorded of Anaxarchus that, while suffering the most excruciating tortures, he exclaimed, "Beat on, tyrant! Thou mayest destroy the shell of Anaxarchus, but thou canst not touch Anaxarchus himself?" The very savage Indians sing amidst the wanton tortures that are inflicted on them, and tauntingly provoke their tormentors to more ingenious cruelty. When we read such stories, we recognise in them the genuine characteristics of man. Man is not a vegetable to be governed by sensations of heat and cold, dryness and moisture. He is a reasonable creature, capable of perceiving what is eligible and right, of fixing indelibly certain principles upon his mind, and adhering inflexibly to the resolutions he has made.

Let us attend for a moment to the general result of the preceding discussions. The tendency of the whole is, to ascertain an important principle in the science of the human mind. If the arguments here adduced be admitted to be valid, it necessarily follows, that whatever can be adequately brought home to the conviction of the understanding, may be depended upon as affording a secure hold upon the conduct. We are no longer at liberty to consider man as divided between two independent principles, or to imagine that his inclinations are in  
any

Inference.



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any case inaccessible through the medium of his reason. We find the thinking principle within us to be uniform and simple; in consequence of which we are entitled to conclude, that it is in every respect the proper subject of education and persuasion, and is susceptible of unlimited improvement. There is no conduct, in itself reasonable, which the refutation of error, and dissipating of uncertainty, will not make appear to be such. There is no conduct which can be shown to be reasonable, the reasons of which may not sooner or later be made impressive, irresistible, and matter of habitual recollection. Lastly, there is no conduct, the reasons of which are thus conclusive and thus communicated, which will not infallibly and uniformly be adopted by the man to whom they are communicated.

IV.  
Vulgar errors.

It may not be improper to attend a little to the light which may be derived from these speculations upon certain maxims, almost universally received, but which, as they convey no distinct ideas, may be productive of mischief, and can scarcely be productive of good.

The first of these is, that the passions ought to be purified, but not to be eradicated. Another, conveying nearly the same lesson, but in different words, is, that passion is not to be conquered by reason, but by bringing some other passion into contention with it.

Meanings of  
the word  
passion:

The word passion is a term extremely vague in its signification. It is used principally in three senses.



senses. It either represents the ardour and vehemence of mind with which any object is pursued; or secondly, that temporary persuasion of excellence and desirableness, which accompanies any action performed by us contrary to our more customary and usual habits of thinking; or lastly, those external modes or necessities to which the whole human species is alike subject, such as hunger, the passion between the sexes, and others. In which of these senses is the word to be understood in the maxims above stated?

In the first sense, it has sufficiently appeared that none of our sensations, or, which is the same thing, none of our ideas, are unaccompanied with a consciousness of pleasure or pain; consequently all our volitions are attended with complacence or aversion. In this sense without doubt passion cannot be eradicated; but in this sense also passion is so far from being incompatible with reason, that it is inseparable from it. Virtue, sincerity, justice, and all those principles which are begotten and cherished in us by a due exercise of reason, will never be very strenuously espoused, till they are ardently loved; that is, till their value is clearly perceived and adequately understood. In this sense nothing is necessary, but to show us that a thing is truly good and worthy to be desired, in order to excite in us a passion for its attainment. If therefore this be the meaning of passion in the above proposition, it

I. ardour :



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is true that passion ought not to be eradicated, but it is equally true that it cannot be eradicated: it is true, that the only way to conquer one passion is by the introduction of another; but it is equally true that, if we employ our rational faculties, we cannot fail of thus conquering our erroneous propensities. The maxims therefore are nugatory.

2. delusion: In the second sense, our passions are ambition, avarice, the love of power, the love of fame, envy, revenge, and innumerable others. Miserable indeed would be our condition, if we could only expel one bad passion by another of the same kind, and there was no way of rooting out delusion from the mind, but by substituting another delusion in its place. But it has been demonstrated at large that this is not the case. Truth is not less powerful, or less friendly to ardent exertion, than error, and needs not fear its encounter. Falshood is not, as such a principle would suppose, the only element in which the human mind can exist, so that, if the space which the mind occupies be too much rarefied and cleared, its existence or health will be in some degree injured. On the contrary, we need not fear any sinister consequences, from the subversion of error, and introducing as much truth into the mind as we can possibly accumulate. All those notions by which we are accustomed to ascribe to any thing a value which it does not really possess, should be eradicated without mercy; and truth, a sound and just



just estimate of things, which is not less favourable to zeal or activity, should be earnestly and incessantly cultivated.

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In the third sense of the word passion, as it describes the result of those circumstances which are common to the whole species, such as hunger and the propensity to the intercourse of the sexes, it seems sufficiently reasonable to say that no attempt ought to be made to eradicate them. But this sentiment was hardly worth the formality of a maxim. So far as these propensities ought to be conquered or restrained, there is no reason why this should not be effected by the due exercise of the understanding. From these illustrations it is sufficiently apparent, that the care recommended to us not to extinguish or seek to extinguish our passions, is founded in a confused or mistaken view of the subject.

3. appetite:

Another maxim not inferior in reputation to those above recited, is that of following nature. But the term nature here, is still more loose and unintelligible than the term passion was before. If it be meant that we ought to accommodate ourselves to hunger and the other appetites which are common to our species, this is probably true. But these appetites, some of them in particular, lead to excess, and the mischief with which they are pregnant is to be corrected, not by consulting our appetites, but our reason. If it be meant that we should follow instinct, it has been proved that we have no in-

of the word  
nature.



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fincts. The advocates of this maxim are apt to consider whatever now exists among mankind as inherent and perpetual, and to conclude that this is to be maintained, not in proportion as it can be shown to be reasonable, but because it is natural. Thus it has been said, that man is naturally a religious animal, and for this reason, and not in proportion to our power of demonstrating the being of a God or the truth of Christianity, religion is to be maintained. Thus again it has been called natural, that men should form themselves into immense tribes or nations, and go to war with each other. Thus persons of narrow views and observation, regard every thing as natural and right, that happens, however capriciously or for however short a time, to prevail in the society in which they live. The only things which can be said to compose the nature or constitution of man, are our external structure, which itself is capable of being modified with indefinite variety; the appetites and impressions growing out of that structure; and the capacity of combining ideas and inferring conclusions. The appetites common to the species we cannot wholly destroy: the faculty of reason it would be absurd systematically to counteract, since it is only by some sort of reasoning, bad or good, that we can so much as adopt any system. In this sense therefore no doubt we ought to follow nature, that is, to employ our understandings and increase our discernment. But, by conforming ourselves to the principles of  
our



our constitution in this respect, we most effectually exclude all following, or implicit assent. If we would fully comport ourselves in a manner correspondent to our properties and powers, we must bring every thing to the standard of reason. Nothing must be admitted either as principle or precept, that will not support this trial. Nothing must be sustained, because it is ancient, because we have been accustomed to regard it as sacred, or because it has been unusual to bring its validity into question. Finally, if by following nature, be understood that we must fix our preference upon things that will conduce to human happiness, in this there is some truth. But the truth it contains, is extremely darkened by the phraseology in which it is couched. We must consider our external structure, so far as relates to the mere question of our preservation. As to the rest, whatever will make a reasonable nature happy will make us happy; and our preference ought to be bestowed upon that species of pleasure which has most independence and most animation.

The corollaries respecting political truth, deducible from the simple proposition, which seems clearly established by the reasonings of the present chapter, that the voluntary actions of men are in all instances conformable to the deductions of their understanding, are of the highest importance. Hence we may infer what are the hopes and prospects of human improvement. The doctrine which may

V.  
Corollaries.



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CHAP. V.

be founded upon these principles, may perhaps best be expressed in the five following propositions: Sound reasoning and truth, when adequately communicated, must always be victorious over error: Sound reasoning and truth are capable of being so communicated: Truth is omnipotent: The vices and moral weakness of man are not invincible: Man is perfectible, or in other words susceptible of perpetual improvement.

These propositions will be found in part synonymous with each other. But the time of the enquirer will not be unprofitably spent, in copiously clearing up the foundations of moral and political system. It is extremely beneficial that truth should be viewed on all sides, and examined under different aspects. The propositions are even little more than so many different modes of stating the principal topic of this chapter. But, if they will not admit each of a distinct train of arguments in its support, it may not however be useless to bestow upon each a short illustration.

Truth will  
prevail over  
error;

The first of these propositions is so evident, that it needs only be stated, in order to the being universally admitted. Is there any one who can imagine that, when sound argument and sophistry are fairly brought into comparison, the victory can be doubtful? Sophistry may assume a plausible appearance, and contrive to a certain extent to bewilder the understanding. But it is one of the prerogatives of truth, to follow it in its mazes and strip



strip it of disguise. Nor does any difficulty from this consideration, interfere with the establishment of the present proposition. We suppose truth not merely to be exhibited, but adequately communicated; that is in other words, distinctly apprehended by the person to whom it is addressed. In this case the victory is too sure to admit of being controverted by the most inveterate scepticism.

The second proposition is, that sound reasoning and truth are capable of being adequately communicated by one man to another. This proposition may be understood of such communication, either as it affects the individual, or the species. First of the individual.

capable of  
being adequately  
communicated :

In order to its due application in this point of view, opportunity for the communication must necessarily be supposed. The incapacity of human intellect at present, requires that this opportunity should be of long duration or repeated recurrence. We do not always know how to communicate all the evidence we are capable of communicating, in a single conversation, and much less in a single instant. But, if the communicator be sufficiently master of his subject, and if the truth be altogether on his side, he must ultimately succeed in his undertaking. We suppose him to have sufficient urbanity to conciliate the good will, and sufficient energy to engage the attention, of the party concerned. In that case, there is no prejudice, no blind reverence for established systems, no false fear of



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the inferences to be drawn, that can resist him. He will encounter these one after the other, and he will encounter them with success. Our prejudices, our undue reverence, and imaginary fears, flow out of some views the mind has been induced to entertain; they are founded in the belief of some propositions. But every one of these propositions is capable of being refuted. The champion we describe, proceeds from point to point; if in any his success have been doubtful, that he will retrace and put out of the reach of mistake; and it is evidently impossible that with such qualifications and such perseverance he should not ultimately accomplish his purpose.

Such is the appearance which this proposition assumes when examined in a loose and practical view. In strict consideration it will not admit of debate. Man is a rational being. If there be any man, who is incapable of making inferences for himself, or of understanding, when stated in the most explicit terms, the inferences of another, him we consider as an abortive production, and not in strictness belonging to the human species. It is absurd therefore to say that sound reasoning and truth cannot be communicated by one man to another. Whenever in any case he fails, it is that he is not sufficiently laborious, patient and clear. We suppose of course the person who undertakes to communicate the truth, really to possess it, and be master of his subject; for it is scarcely worth an  
observation



observation to say, that that which he has not himself, he cannot communicate to another.

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If truth therefore can be brought home to the conviction of the individual, let us see how it stands with the public or the world. Now in the first place, it is extremely clear that, if no individual can resist the force of truth, it can only be necessary to apply this proposition from individual to individual, and we shall at length comprehend the whole. Thus the affirmation in its literal sense is completely established.

With respect to the chance of success, this will depend, first, upon the precluding all extraordinary convulsions of nature, and after this upon the activity and energy of those to whose hands the sacred cause of truth may be intrusted. It is apparent that, if justice be done to its merits, it includes in it the indestructible germ of ultimate victory. Every new convert that is made to its cause, if he be taught its excellence as well as its reality, is a fresh apostle to extend its illuminations through a wider sphere. In this respect it resembles the motion of a falling body, which increases its rapidity in proportion to the squares of the distances. Add to which, that, when a convert to truth has been adequately informed, it is barely possible that he should ever fail in his adherence; whereas error contains in it the principle of its own mortality. Thus the advocates of falsehood and mistake must continually



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continually diminish, and the well informed adherents of truth incessantly multiply.

It has sometimes been affirmed that, whenever a question is ably brought forward for examination, the decision of the human species must ultimately be on the right side. But this proposition is to be understood with allowances. Civil policy, magnificent emoluments and sinister motives may upon many occasions, by distracting the attention, cause the worse reason to pass as if it were the better. It is not absolutely certain that, in the controversy brought forward by Clarke and Whiston against the doctrine of the Trinity, or by Collins and Woolston against the Christian revelation, the innovators had altogether the worst of the argument. Yet fifty years after the agitation of these controversies, their effects could scarcely be traced, and things appeared on all sides as if the controversies had never existed. Perhaps it will be said that, though the effects of truth may be obscured for a time, they will break out in the sequel with double lustre. But this at least depends upon circumstances. No comet must come in the mean time, and sweep away the human species: no Attila must have it in his power once again to lead back the flood of barbarism to deluge the civilised world: and the disciples, or at least the books of the original champions must remain, or their discoveries and demonstrations must be nearly lost to the world.

The



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omnipotent,

The third of the propositions enumerated is, that truth is omnipotent. This proposition, which is convenient for its brevity, must be understood with limitations. It would be absurd to affirm that truth, unaccompanied by the evidence which proves it to be such, or when that evidence is partially and imperfectly stated, has any such property. But it has sufficiently appeared from the arguments already adduced, that truth, when adequately communicated, is, so far as relates to the conviction of the understanding, irresistible. There may indeed be propositions, which, though true in themselves, may be beyond the sphere of human knowledge, or respecting which human beings have not yet discovered sufficient arguments for their support. In that case, though true in themselves, they are not truths to us. The reasoning by which they are attempted to be established, is not sound reasoning. It may perhaps be found that the human mind is not capable of arriving at absolute certainty upon any subject of enquiry; and it must be admitted that human science is attended with all degrees of certainty, from the highest moral evidence to the slightest balance of probability. But human beings are capable of apprehending and weighing all these degrees; and to know the exact quantity of probability which I ought to ascribe to any proposition, may be said to be in one sense the possessing certain knowledge. It would further be absurd, if we regard truth in relation to its empire over our conduct,



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duct, to suppose that it is not limited in its operations by the faculties of our frame. It may be compared to a connoisseur, who, however consummate be his talents, can extract from a given instrument only such tones as that instrument will afford. But, within these limits, the deduction which forms the principal substance of this chapter, proves to us, that whatever is brought home to the conviction of the understanding, so long as it is present to the mind, possesses an undisputed empire over the conduct. Nor will he who is sufficiently conversant with the science of intellect, be hasty in assigning the bounds of our capacity. There are some things which the structure of our bodies will render us for ever unable to effect; but in many cases the lines, which appear to prescribe a term to our efforts, will, like the mists that arise from a lake, retire further and further, the more closely we endeavour to approach them.

Vice not  
incurable.

Fourthly, the vices and moral weakness of man are not invincible. This is the preceding proposition with a very slight variation in the statement. Vice and weakness are founded upon ignorance and error; but truth is more powerful than any champion that can be brought into the field against it; consequently truth has the faculty of expelling weakness and vice, and placing nobler and more beneficent principles in their stead.

Perfectibility  
of man.

Lastly, man is perfectible. This proposition needs some explanation.

By



By perfectible, it is not meant that he is capable of being brought to perfection. But the word seems sufficiently adapted to express the faculty of being continually made better and receiving perpetual improvement; and in this sense it is here to be understood. The term perfectible, thus explained, not only does not imply the capacity of being brought to perfection, but stands in express opposition to it. If we could arrive at perfection, there would be an end to our improvement. There is however one thing of great importance that it does imply: every perfection or excellence that human beings are competent to conceive, human beings, unless in cases that are palpably and unequivocally excluded by the structure of their frame, are competent to attain.

This is an inference which immediately follows from the omnipotence of truth. Every truth that is capable of being communicated, is capable of being brought home to the conviction of the mind. Every principle which can be brought home to the conviction of the mind, will infallibly produce a correspondent effect upon the conduct. If there were not something in the nature of man incompatible with absolute perfection, the doctrine of the omnipotence of truth would afford no small probability that he would one day reach it. Why is the perfection of man impossible?

The idea of absolute perfection is scarcely within the grasp of human understanding. If science  
I were



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were more familiarised to speculations of this sort, we should perhaps discover that the notion itself was pregnant with absurdity and contradiction.

It is not necessary in this argument to dwell upon the limited nature of the human faculties. We can neither be present to all places nor to all times. We cannot penetrate into the essences of things, or rather we have no sound and satisfactory knowledge of things external to ourselves, but merely of our own sensations. We cannot discover the causes of things, or ascertain that in the antecedent which connects it with the consequent, and discern nothing but their contiguity\*. With what pretence can a being thus shut in on all sides lay claim to absolute perfection?

But, not to insist upon these considerations, there is one principle in the human mind, which must for ever exclude us from arriving at a close of our acquisitions, and confine us to perpetual progress. The human mind, so far as we are acquainted with it, is nothing else but a faculty of perception. All our knowledge, all our ideas, every thing we possess as intelligent beings, comes from impression. All the minds that exist, set out from absolute ignorance. They received first one impression, and then a second. As the impressions became more numerous, and were stored by the help of memory, and combined by the faculty of association, so the experience in-

\* Book IV, Chap. VII.

creased,



creased, and with the experience the knowledge, the wisdom, every thing that distinguishes man from what we understand by a "clod of the valley." This seems to be a simple and incontrovertible history of intellectual being; and, if it be true, then as our accumulations have been incessant in the time that is gone, so, as long as we continue to perceive, to remember or reflect, they must perpetually increase.

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CH A P. VI.

OF THE INFLUENCE OF CLIMATE.

*Means by which liberty is to be introduced.—Their efficacy illustrated.—Facts in confirmation of these reasonings.—Inference.*

TWO points further are necessary to be illustrated, in order to render our view of man in his social capacity impartial and complete. There are certain physical causes which have commonly been supposed to oppose an immoveable barrier to the political improvement of our species: climate, which is imagined to render the introduction of liberal principles upon this subject in some cases impossible: and luxury, which, in addition to this disqualification, precludes their revival even in countries

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countries where they had once most eminently flourished.

An answer to both these objections is included in what has been offered upon the subject of the voluntary actions of man. If truth, when properly displayed, be omnipotent, then neither climate nor luxury are invincible obstacles. But so much stress has been laid upon these topics, and they have been so eloquently enforced by poets and men like poets, that it seems necessary to bestow upon them a distinct examination.

Means by  
which li-  
berty is to be  
introduced.

“It is impossible,” say some, “to establish a system of political liberty in certain warm and effeminate climates.” To enable us to judge of the reasonableness of this affirmation, let us consider what process would be necessary in order to introduce political liberty into any country.

The answer to this question is to be found in the answer to that other, whether freedom have any real and solid advantages over slavery? If it have, then our mode of proceeding respecting it, ought to be exactly parallel to that we should employ in recommending any other benefit. If I would persuade a man to accept a great estate, supposing that possession to be a real advantage; if I would induce him to select for his companion a beautiful and accomplished woman, or for his friend a wife, a brave and disinterested man; if I would persuade him to prefer ease to pain, and gratification to torture, what more is necessary, than



than that I should inform his understanding, and make him see these things in their true and genuine colours? Should I find it necessary to enquire first of what climate he was a native, and whether that were favourable to the possession of a great estate, a fine woman, or a generous friend?

The advantages of liberty over slavery are not less real, though unfortunately they have been made less palpable in their application to the welfare of communities at large, than the advantages to accrue in the cases above enumerated. Every man has a confused sense of the real state of the question; but he has been taught to believe that men would tear each other to pieces, if they had not priests to direct their consciences, lords to consult for their tranquillity, and kings to pilot them in safety through the dangers of the political ocean. But whether they be misled by these or other prejudices, whatever be the fancied terror that induces them quietly to submit to have their hands bound behind them, and the scourge vibrated over their heads, all these are questions of reason. Truth may be presented to them in such irresistible evidence, perhaps by such just degrees familiarised to their apprehension, as ultimately to conquer the most obstinate prepossessions. Let the press find its way into Persia or Indostan, let the political truths discovered by the best of the European sages be transfused into their language, and it is impossible that a few solitary converts

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should not be made. It is the property of truth to spread; and, exclusively of any powerful counteraction, its advocates in each succeeding year will be somewhat more numerous than in that which went before. The causes, which suspend its progress, arise, not from climate, but from the watchful and intolerant jealousy of despotic sovereigns. —What is here stated is in fact little more than a branch of the principle which has been so generally recognised, “that government is founded in opinion \*.”

Their efficacy illustrated.

Let us suppose then that the majority of a nation, by however slow a progress, is convinced of the desirableness, or, which amounts to the same, the practicability of freedom. The supposition would be parallel, if we were to imagine ten thousand men of sound intellect, shut up in a madhouse, and superintended by a set of three or four keepers. Hitherto they have been persuaded, for what absurdity has been too great for human intellect to entertain? that they were destitute of reason, and that the superintendence under which they were placed, was necessary for their preservation. They have therefore submitted to whips and straw and bread and water, and perhaps imagined this tyranny to be a blessing. But a suspicion is at length by some means propagated among them, that all they have hitherto endured has been an

\* Hume's Essays, Part I, Essay iv.

imposition.



imposition. The suspicion spreads, they reflect, they reason, the idea is communicated from one to another through the chinks of their cells, and at certain times when the vigilance of their keepers has not precluded them from mutual society. It becomes the clear perception, the settled persuasion of the majority of the persons confined.

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What will be the consequence of this opinion? Will the influence of climate prevent them from embracing the obvious means of their happiness? Is there any human understanding that will not perceive a truth like this, when forcibly and repeatedly presented? Is there a mind that will conceive no impatience of so horrible a tyranny? In reality the chains fall off of themselves, when the magic of opinion is dissolved. When a great majority of any society are persuaded to secure any benefit to themselves, there is no need of tumult or violence to effect it. The effort would be to resist reason, not to obey it. The prisoners are collected in their common hall, and the keepers inform them that it is time to return to their cells. They have no longer the power to obey. They look at the impotence of their late masters, and smile at their presumption. They quietly leave the mansion where they were hitherto immured, and partake of the blessings of light and air like other men.

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It



BOOK I.  
CHAP. VI.Facts in  
confirma-  
tion of these  
reasonings.

It may perhaps be useful to consider how far these reasonings upon the subject of liberty, are confirmed to us by general experience as to the comparative inefficacy of climate, and the superior influence of circumstances, political and social. The following instances are for the most part abridged from the judicious collections of Hume upon the subject\*.

1. If the theory here asserted be true, we may expect to find the inhabitants of neighbouring provinces in different states, widely discriminated by the influence of government, and little assimilated by resemblance of climate. Thus the Gascons are the gayest people in France; but the moment we pass the Pyrenees, we find the serious and saturnine character of the Spaniard. Thus the Athenians were lively, penetrating and ingenious; but the Thebans unpolished, phlegmatic and dull. 2. It would be reasonable to expect that different races of men, intermixed with each other, but differently governed, would afford a strong and visible contrast. Thus the Turks are brave, open and sincere; but the modern Greeks mean, cowardly and deceitful. 3. Wandering tribes closely connected among themselves, and having little sympathy with the people with whom they reside, may be expected to have great similarity of manners. Their situation renders them

\* Essays; Part I, Essay xxi.



conspicuous, the faults of individuals reflect dishonour upon the whole, and their manners will be particularly sober and reputable, unless they should happen to labour under so peculiar an odium as to render all endeavour after reputation fruitless. Thus the Armenians in the East are as universally distinguished among the nations with whom they reside, as the Jews in Europe; but the Armenians are noted for probity, and the Jews for extortion.

4. What resemblance is there between the ancient and the modern Greeks, between the old Romans and the present inhabitants of Italy, between the Gauls and the French? Diodorus Siculus describes the Gauls as particularly given to taciturnity, and Aristotle affirms that they are the only warlike nation who are negligent of women.

If on the contrary climate were principally concerned in forming the characters of nations, we might expect to find heat and cold producing an extraordinary effect upon men, as they do upon plants and inferior animals. But the reverse of this appears to be the fact. Is it supposed that the neighbourhood of the sun renders men gay, fantastic and ingenious? While the French, the Greeks and the Persians have been remarkable for their gaiety, the Spaniards, the Turks and the Chinese are not less distinguished by the seriousness of their deportment. It was the opinion of the ancients that the northern nations were incapable of civilisation and improvement; but the mo-



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derns have found that the English are not inferior in literary eminence to any nation in the world. Is it asserted that the northern nations are more hardy and courageous, and that conquest has usually travelled from that to the opposite quarter? It would have been truer to say that conquest is usually made by poverty upon plenty. The Turks, who from the deserts of Tartary invaded the fertile provinces of the Roman empire, met the Saracens half way, who were advancing with similar views from the no less dreary deserts of Arabia. In their extreme perhaps heat and cold may determine the characters of nations, of the negroes for example on one side, and the Laplanders on the other. Not but that, in this very instance, much may be ascribed to the wretchedness of a sterile climate on the one hand, and to the indolence consequent upon a spontaneous fertility on the other. As to what is more than this, the remedy has not yet been discovered. Physical causes have already appeared to be powerful, till moral ones can be brought into operation.

Has it been alleged that carnivorous nations are endowed with the greatest courage? The Swedes, whose nutriment is meagre and sparing, have ranked with the most distinguished modern nations in the operations of war.

It is usually said, that northern nations are most addicted to wine, and southern to women. Admitting this observation in its full force, it would  
only



only prove that climate may operate upon the grosser particles of our frame, not that it influences those finer organs upon which the operations of intellect depend. But the truth of the first of these remarks may well be doubted. The Greeks appear to have been sufficiently addicted to the pleasures of the bottle. Among the Persians no character was more coveted than that of a hard drinker. It is easy to obtain any thing of the negroes, even their wives and children, in exchange for liquor.

As to women the circumstance may be accounted for from moral causes. The heat of the climate obliges both sexes to go half naked. The animal arrives sooner at maturity in hot countries. And both these circumstances produce vigilance and jealousy, causes which inevitably tend to inflame the passions.

The result of these reasonings is of the utmost importance to him who speculates upon principles of government. There have been writers on this subject who, admitting, and even occasionally declaiming with enthusiasm upon the advantages of liberty and the equal claims of mankind to every social benefit, have yet concluded, "that the corruptions of despotism, and the usurpations of aristocracy, were congenial to certain ages and divisions of the world, and under proper limitations entitled to our approbation." But this hypothesis will be found unable to endure the test of serious reflection.

Inference.



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tion. There is no state of mankind that renders them incapable of the exercise of reason. There is no period in which it is necessary to hold the human species in a condition of pupillage. If there were, it would seem but reasonable that their superintendents and guardians, as in the case of infants of another sort, should provide for the means of their subsistence without calling upon them for the exertions of their own understanding. Wherever men are competent to look the first duties of humanity in the face, and to provide for their defence against the invasions of hunger and the inclemencies of the sky, it can scarcely be thought that they are not equally capable of every other exertion that may be essential to their security and welfare.

The real enemies of liberty in any country are not the people, but those higher orders who find their imaginary profit in a contrary system. Infuse just views of society into a certain number of the liberally educated and reflecting members; give to the people guides and instructors; and the business is done. This however is not to be accomplished but in a gradual manner, as will more fully appear in the sequel. The error lies, not in tolerating the worst forms of government for a time, but in supposing a change impracticable, and not incessantly looking forward to its accomplishment.



## CHAP. VII.

## OF THE INFLUENCE OF LUXURY.

*The objection stated.—Source of this objection.—Refuted from mutability—from mortality—from sympathy.—The probability of perseverance considered.*

THE second objection to the principles already established, is derived from the influence of luxury, and affirms, “that nations, like individuals, are subject to the phenomena of youth and old age, and that, when a people by effeminacy and depravation of manners have sunk into decrepitude, it is not within the compass of human ability to restore them to vigour and innocence.”

This idea has been partly founded upon the romantic notions of pastoral life and the golden age. Innocence is not virtue. Virtue demands the active employment of an ardent mind in the promotion of the general good. No man can be eminently virtuous, who is not accustomed to an extensive range of reflection. He must see all the benefits to arise from a disinterested proceeding, and must understand the proper method of producing those benefits. Ignorance, the slothful habits and limited views of uncultivated life, have not in them more of true virtue, though they may be

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The objection stated.

Source of this objection.



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be more harmless, than luxury, vanity and extravagance. Individuals of exquisite feeling, whose disgust has been excited by the hardened selfishness or the unblushing corruption which have prevailed in their own times, have recurred in imagination to the forests of Norway or the bleak and uncomfortable Highlands of Scotland in search of a purer race of mankind. This imagination has been the offspring of disappointment, not the dictate of reason and philosophy.

It may be true, that ignorance is nearer than prejudice to the reception of wisdom, and that the absence of virtue is a condition more auspicious, than the presence of its opposite. In this case it would have been juster to compare a nation sunk in luxury, to an individual with confirmed habits of wrong, than to an individual whom a debilitated constitution was bringing fast to the grave. But neither would that comparison have been fair and equitable.

Refuted  
from mutability:

The condition of nations is more fluctuating, and will be found less obstinate in its resistance to a consistent endeavour for their improvement, than that of individuals. In nations some of their members will be less confirmed in error than others. A certain number will be only in a very small degree indisposed to listen to the voice of truth. This number, from the very nature of just sentiments, must in the ordinary course of things perpetually increase. Every new convert will be  
the



the means of converting others. In proportion as the body of disciples is augmented, the modes of attack upon the prejudices of others will be varied, and suited to the variety of men's tempers and prepossessions.

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Add to this that generations of men are perpetually going off the stage, while other generations succeed. The next generation will not have so many prejudices to subdue. Suppose a despotic nation by some revolution in its affairs to become possessed of the advantages of freedom. The children of the present race will be bred in more firm and independent habits of thinking; the suppleness, the timidity, and the vicious dexterity of their fathers, will give place to an erect mien, and a clear and decisive judgment. The partial and imperfect change of character which was introduced at first, will in the succeeding age become more unalloyed and complete.

from mortality:

Lastly, the power of reasonable and just ideas in changing the character of nations, is in one respect infinitely greater than any power which can be brought to bear upon a solitary individual. The case is not of that customary sort, where the force of theory alone is tried in curing any person of his errors; but is as if he should be placed in an entirely new situation. His habits are broken through, and his motives of action changed. Instead of being perpetually recalled to vicious practices by the recurrence of his former connections, the

from sympathy.



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bility of per-  
severance  
considered.

the whole society receives an impulse, from the same cause that acts upon the individual. New ideas are suggested, and the languor and imbecility which might be incident to each, are counteracted by the spectacle of general enthusiasm and concert.

But it has been further alleged, “that, even should a luxurious nation be induced, by intolerable grievances, and notorious usurpation, to embrace just principles of human society, they would be unable to perpetuate them, and would soon be led back by their evil habits to their former vices and corruption:” that is, they would be capable of the heroic energy that should expel the usurper, but not of the moderate resolution that should prevent his return. They would rouse themselves so far from their lethargy as to assume a new character and enter into different views; but, after having for some time acted upon their convictions, they would suddenly become incapable of understanding the truth of their principles and feeling their influence.

Men always act upon their apprehensions of preferableness. There are few errors of which they are guilty, which may not be resolved into a narrow and inadequate view of the alternative presented for their choice. Present pleasure may appear more certain and eligible than distant good. But they never choose evil as apprehended to be evil. Wherever a clear and unanswerable notion  
of



of any subject is presented to their view, a correspondent action or course of actions inevitably follows. Having thus gained one step in the acquisition of truth, it cannot easily be conceived as lost. A body of men, having detected the injurious consequences of an evil under which they have long laboured, and having shaken it off, will scarcely voluntarily restore the mischief they have annihilated. No recollection of past error can reasonably be supposed to have strength enough to lead back, into absurdity and uncompensated subjection, men who have once been thoroughly awakened to the perception of truth.

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## CHAP. VIII.

HUMAN INVENTIONS SUSCEPTIBLE OF PERFECTUAL IMPROVEMENT.

*Perfectibility of man—instanced, first, in language.—Its beginning.—Abstraction.—Complexity of language.—Second instance: alphabetical writing.—Hieroglyphics at first universal.—Progressive deviations.—Application.*

**B**EFORE we proceed to the direct subject of the present enquiry, it may not be improper to resume the subject of human improveableness, and consider it in a somewhat greater detail. An opinion

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Perfectibility of man:



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opinion has been extensively entertained, "that the differences of the human species in different ages and countries, particularly so far as relates to moral principles of conduct, are extremely insignificant and trifling; that we are deceived in this respect by distance and confounded by glare; but that in reality the virtues and vices of men, collectively taken, always have remained, and of consequence," it is said, "always will remain, nearly at the same point."

The erroneoufness of this opinion will perhaps be more completely exposed, by a summary recollection of the actual history of our species, than by the closest deductions of abstract reason. We will in this place simply remind the reader of the great changes which man has undergone as an intellectual being, entitling us to infer the probability of improvements not less essential, to be realised in future. The conclusion to be deduced from this delineation, that his moral improvements will in some degree keep pace with his intellectual, and his actions correspond with his opinions, must depend for its force upon the train of reasoning which has already been brought forward under that head\*.

Let us carry back our minds to man in his original state, a being capable of impressions and knowledge to an unbounded extent, but not having as yet received the one or cultivated the other;

\* Chap. V.



let us contrast this being with all that science and genius have effected; and from hence we may form some idea what it is of which human nature is capable. It is to be remembered, that this being did not, as now, derive assistance from the communications of his fellows, nor had his feeble and crude conceptions amended by the experience of successive centuries; but that in the state we are figuring all men were equally ignorant. The field of improvement was before them, but for every step in advance they were to be indebted to their untutored efforts. Nor is it of consequence whether such was actually the progress of mind, or whether, as others teach, the progress was abridged, and man was immediately advanced half way to the end of his career by the interposition of the author of his nature. In any case it is an allowable, and will be found no unimproving speculation, to consider mind as it is in itself, and to enquire what would have been its history if, immediately upon its production, it had been left to be acted upon by those ordinary laws of the universe with whose operation we are acquainted.

One of the acquisitions most evidently requisite as a preliminary to our present improvements, is that of language. But it is impossible to conceive an acquisition, that must have been in its origin more different from what at present it is found, or that less promised that copiousness and refinement it has since exhibited.

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in language.

Its



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Its begin-  
ning.

Its beginning was probably from those involuntary cries, which infants, for example, are found to utter in the earliest stages of their existence, and which, previously to the idea of exciting pity or procuring assistance, spontaneously arise from the operation of pain upon our animal frame. These cries, when actually uttered, become a subject of perception to him by whom they are uttered; and, being observed to be constantly associated with certain antecedent impressions and to excite the idea of those impressions in the hearer, may afterwards be repeated from reflection and the desire of relief. Eager desire to communicate any information to another, will also prompt us to utter some simple sound for the purpose of exciting attention: this sound will probably frequently recur to organs unpractised to variety, and will at length stand as it were by convention for the information intended to be conveyed. But the distance is extreme from these simple modes of communication, which we possess in common with some of the inferior animals, to all the analysis and abstraction which languages require.

Abstraction.

Abstraction indeed, though, as it is commonly understood, it be one of the sublimest operations of mind, is in some sort coeval with and inseparable from the existence of mind\*. The next step to simple

\* The question, whether or not the human mind is capable of forming abstract ideas, has been the subject of much profound



simple perception is that of comparison, or the coupling together of two ideas and the perception of

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found and serious disquisition. It is certain that we have a general standard of some sort, in consequence of which, if an animal is presented to our view, we can in most cases decide that it is, or is not, a horse, a man, &c.; nor is it to be imagined that we should be unable to form such judgments, even if we were denied the use of speech.

It is a curious fact, and on that account worthy to be mentioned in this place, that the human mind is perhaps incapable of entertaining any but general ideas. Take, for example, a wine glass. If, after this glass is withdrawn, I present to you another from the same set, you will probably be unable to determine whether it is another or the same. It is with a like inattention that people in general view a flock of sheep. The shepherd only distinguishes the features of every one of his sheep from the features of every other. But it is impossible so to individualise our remarks, as to cause our idea to be truly particular, and not special. Thus there are memorable instances of one man so nearly resembling another, as to be able to pass himself upon the wife and all the relatives of this man, as if he were the same.

The opposition which has been so ingeniously maintained against the doctrine of abstract ideas, seems chiefly to have arisen from a habit of using the term idea, not, as Locke has done, for every conception that can exist in the mind, but as constantly descriptive of an image, or picture. The following view of the subject will perhaps serve in some degree to remove any ambiguity that might continue to rest upon it.

Ideas, considering that term as comprehending all perceptions, both primary, or of the senses, and secondary, or of the memory, may be divided into four classes: 1. perfect. The existence of these we have disproved. 2. imperfect, such as those which are produced in us by a near and careful inspection of any visi-



of their resemblances and differences. Without comparison there can be no preference, and without preference no voluntary action: though it must be acknowledged, that this comparison is an operation which may be performed by the mind without adverting to its nature, and that neither the brute nor the savage has a consciousness of the several steps of the intellectual progress. Comparison immediately leads to imperfect abstraction. The sensation of to-day is classed, if similar, with the sensation of yesterday, and an inference is made respecting the conduct to be adopted. Without this degree of abstraction, the faint dawnings of language already described, could never have existed.

ble object. 3. imperfect, such as those produced by a slight and distant view. 4. imperfect, so as to have no resemblance to an image of any external object. The perception produced in us in slight and current discourse by the words, river, field, are of this nature; and have no more resemblance to the image of any visible object, than the perception ordinarily produced in us by the words, conquest, government, virtue.

The subject of this last class of ideas is very ingeniously treated by Burke, in his *Enquiry into the Sublime*, *Part V.* He has however committed one material error in the discussion, by representing these as instances of the employment of "words without ideas." If we recollect that brutes have similar abstractions, and a general conception, of the female of their own species, of man, of food, of the smart of a whip, &c. we shall probably admit that such perceptions (and in all events they are perceptions, or, according to the established language upon the subject, ideas) are not necessarily connected with the employment of words.



Abstraction, which was necessary to the first existence of language, is again assisted in its operations by language. That generalisation, which is implied in the very notion of a thinking being, being thus embodied and rendered a matter of sensible impression, makes the mind acquainted with its own powers, and creates a restless desire after further progress.

But, though it be by no means impossible, to trace the causes that concurred to the production of language, and to prove them adequate to their effect, it does not the less appear that this is an acquisition of slow growth and inestimable value. The very steps, were we to pursue them, would appear like an endless labyrinth. The distance is immeasurable, between the three or four vague and inarticulate sounds uttered by animals, and the copiousness of lexicography or the regularity of grammar. The general and special names by which things are at first complicated and afterwards divided, the names by which properties are separated from their substances, and powers from both, the comprehensive distribution of parts of speech, verbs, adjectives and particles, the inflections of words by which the change of their terminations changes their meaning through a variety of shadings, their concords and their governments, all of them present us with such a boundless catalogue of science, that he, who on the one hand did not know that the task had been actually performed, or who

Complexity  
of language.



BOOK I.  
CHAP.  
VIII.

Second in-  
stance: al-  
phabetical  
writing.

Hierogly-  
phics at first  
universal.

on the other was not intimately acquainted with the progressive nature of mind, would pronounce the accomplishment of them impossible.

A second invention, well calculated to impress us with a sense of the progressive nature of man, is that of alphabetical writing. Hieroglyphical or picture-writing appears at some time to have been universal, and the difficulty of conceiving the gradation from this to alphabetical is so great, as to have induced Hartley, one of the most acute philosophical writers, to have recourse to miraculous interposition as the only adequate solution. In reality no problem can be imagined more operose, than that of decomposing the sounds of words into four and twenty simple elements or letters, and again finding these elements in all other words. When we have examined the subject a little more closely, and perceived the steps by which this labour was accomplished, perhaps the immensity of the labour will rather gain upon us, as he that shall have counted a million of units, will have a vaster idea upon the subject, than he that only considers them in the gross.

Progressive  
deviations.

In China hieroglyphical writing has never been superseded by alphabetical, and this from the very nature of their language, which is considerably monosyllabic, the same sound being made to signify a great variety of objects, by means of certain shadings of tone too delicate for any alphabet to represent. They have however two kinds of writing,  
one



one for the learned, and another for the vulgar. The learned adhere closely to their hieroglyphical writing, representing every word by its corresponding picture; but the vulgar are frequent in their deviations from it.

Hieroglyphical writing and speech may indeed be considered in the first instance as two languages running parallel to each other, but with no necessary connection. The picture and the word, each of them, represent the idea, one as immediately as the other. But, though independent, they will become accidentally associated; the picture at first imperfectly, and afterwards more constantly suggesting the idea of its correspondent sound. It is in this manner that the mercantile classes of China began to corrupt, as it is styled, their hieroglyphical writing. They had a word suppose of two syllables to write. The character appropriate to that word they were not acquainted with, or it failed to suggest itself to their memory. Each of the syllables however was a distinct word in the language, and the characters belonging to them perfectly familiar. The expedient that suggested itself was to write these two characters with a mark signifying their union, though in reality the characters had hitherto been appropriated to ideas of a different sort, wholly unconnected with that now intended to be conveyed. Thus a sort of rebus or charade was produced. In other cases the word, though monosyllabic, was capable of being divided into two

I 3                      sounds,



BOOK I.  
CHAP.  
VIII.

sounds, and the same process was employed. This is a first step towards alphabetical analysis. Some word, such as the interjection *O!* or the particle *A*, is already a sound perfectly simple, and thus furnishes a first stone to the edifice. But, though these ideas may perhaps present us with a faint view of the manner in which an alphabet was produced, yet the actual production of a complete alphabet is perhaps of all human discoveries, that which required the most persevering reflection, the luckiest concurrence of circumstances, and the most patient and gradual progress.

Application.

Let us however suppose man to have gained the two first elements of knowledge, speaking and writing; let us trace him through all his subsequent improvements, through whatever constitutes the inequality between Newton and the ploughman, and indeed much more than this, since the most ignorant ploughman in civilised society is infinitely different from what he would have been, when stripped of all the benefits he has derived from literature and the arts. Let us survey the earth covered with the labours of man, houses, inclosures, harvests, manufactures, instruments, machines, together with all the wonders of painting, poetry, eloquence and philosophy.

Such was man in his original state, and such is man as we at present behold him. Is it possible for us to contemplate what he has already done, without being impressed with a strong presentiment of  
of



of the improvements he has yet to accomplish? There is no science that is not capable of additions; there is no art that may not be carried to a still higher perfection. If this be true of all other sciences, why not of morals? If this be true of all other arts, why not of social institution? The very conception of this as possible, is in the highest degree encouraging. If we can still further demonstrate it to be a part of the natural and regular progress of mind, our confidence and our hopes will then be complete. This is the temper with which we ought to engage in the study of political truth. Let us look back, that we may profit by the experience of mankind; but let us not look back, as if the wisdom of our ancestors was such, as to leave no room for future improvement.



ENQUIRY  
CONCERNING  
POLITICAL JUSTICE.

BOOK II.  
PRINCIPLES OF SOCIETY.

CHAP. I.  
INTRODUCTION.

*Nature of the enquiry.—Connection of politics and morals.—Mistakes to which the enquiry has been exposed.—Distinction between society and government.*

BOOK II.  
CHAP. I.

**I**N the preceding book we have cleared the foundations for the remaining branches of enquiry, and shown what are the prospects it is reasonable to entertain as to future political improvement. The effects which are produced by positive institutions, have there been delineated, as well as the extent of the powers of man, considered in his social capacity. It is time that we proceed to those disquisitions which are more immediately the object of the present work.

Political



Political enquiry may be distributed under two heads : first, what are the regulations which will conduce to the well being of man in society ; and, secondly, what is the authority which is competent to prescribe regulations.

BOOK II.  
CHAP. I.

Nature of  
the enquiry.

The regulations to which the conduct of men living in society ought to be conformed, may be considered in two ways : first, those moral laws which are enjoined upon us by the dictates of enlightened reason ; and, secondly, those principles a deviation from which the interest of the community may be supposed to render it proper to repress by sanctions and punishment.

Connection  
of politics  
and morals.

Morality is that system of conduct which is determined by a consideration of the greatest general good : he is entitled to the highest moral approbation, whose conduct is, in the greatest number of instances, or in the most momentous instances, governed by views of benevolence, and made subservient to public utility. In like manner the only regulations which any political authority can be justly entitled to enforce, are such as are best adapted to public utility. Consequently, just political regulations are nothing more than a certain select part of moral law. The supreme power in a state ought not, in the strictest sense, to require any thing of its members, that an understanding sufficiently enlightened would not prescribe without such interference\*.

\* Chap. V of the following Book.

These



BOOK II.  
CHAP. I.

Mistakes to  
which the  
enquiry has  
been expos-  
ed.

These considerations seem to lead to the detection of a mistake which has been very generally committed, by political writers of our own country. They have for the most part confined their researches to the question of What is a just political authority or the most eligible form of government, consigning to others the delineation of right principles of conduct and equitable regulations. But there appears to be something preposterous in this mode of proceeding. A well constituted government is only the means for enforcing suitable regulations. One form of government is preferable to another in exact proportion to the security it affords, that nothing shall be done in the name of the community, which is not conducive to the welfare of the whole. The question therefore, What it is which is thus conducive, is upon every account entitled to the first place in our disquisitions.

One of the ill consequences which have resulted from this distorted view of the science of politics, is a notion very generally entertained, that a community, or society of men, has a right to lay down whatever rules it may think proper for its own observance. This will presently be proved to be an erroneous position\*. It may be prudent in an individual to submit in some cases to the usurpation of a majority; it may be unavoidable in a community to proceed upon the imperfect and erroneous views they shall chance to entertain: but this is a

\* Chap. V of this Book.

misfortune



misfortune entailed upon us by the nature of government, and not a matter of right\*.

BOOK II.  
CHAP. I.

A second ill consequence that has arisen from this proceeding, is that, politics having been thus violently separated from morality, government itself has no longer been compared with its true criterion. Instead of enquiring what species of government was most conducive to the public welfare, an unprofitable disquisition has been instituted respecting the probable origin of government; and its different forms have been estimated, not by the consequences with which they were pregnant, but the source from which they sprung. Hence men have been prompted to look back to the folly of their ancestors, rather than forward to the benefits derivable from the improvements of human knowledge. Hence, in investigating their rights, they have recurred less to the great principles of morality, than to the records and charters of a barbarous age. As if men were not entitled to all the benefits of the social state, till they could prove their inheriting them from some bequest of their distant progenitors. As if men were not as justifiable and meritorious, in planting liberty in a soil in which it had never existed, as in restoring it where it could be proved only to have suffered a temporary suspension.

The reasons here assigned, strongly tend to evince the necessity of establishing the genuine principles

Distinction  
between so-  
ciety and  
government.

\* Chap. V.

of



BOOK II.  
CHAP. I.

of society, before we enter upon the direct consideration of government. It may be proper in this place to state the fundamental distinction which exists between these topics of enquiry. Men associated at first for the sake of mutual assistance. They did not foresee that any restraint would be necessary, to regulate the conduct of individual members of the society, towards each other, or towards the whole. The necessity of restraint grew out of the errors and perverseness of a few. An acute writer has expressed this idea with peculiar felicity. "Society and government," says he, "are different in themselves, and have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness. Society is in every state a blessing; government even in its best state but a necessary evil\*."

\* Common Sense, p. 1.

CHAP.



## CHAP. II.

## OF JUSTICE.

*Extent and meaning of justice.—Subject of justice : mankind.—Its distribution measured by the capacity of its subject—by his usefulness.—Self-love considered.—Family affection.—Gratitude.—Objections : from ignorance—from utility.—An exception stated.—Remark.—Degrees of justice.—Application.—Idea of political justice.*

FROM what has been said it appears, that the subject of our present enquiry is strictly speaking a department of the science of morals. Morality is the source from which its fundamental axioms must be drawn, and they will be made somewhat clearer in the present instance, if we assume the term justice as a general appellation for all moral duty.

That this appellation is sufficiently expressive of the subject will appear, if we examine mercy, gratitude, temperance, or any of those duties which, in looser speaking, are contradistinguished from justice. Why should I pardon this criminal, remunerate this favour, or abstain from this indulgence? If it partake of the nature of morality, it must be either right or wrong, just or unjust. It must tend to the benefit

BOOK II.  
CHAP. II.

Extent and  
meaning of  
justice.



BOOK II.  
CHAP. II.

of the individual, either without trenching upon, or with actual advantage to the mass of individuals. Either way it benefits the whole, because individuals are parts of the whole. Therefore to do it is just, and to forbear it is unjust.—By justice I understand that impartial treatment of every man in matters that relate to his happiness, which is measured solely by a consideration of the properties of the receiver, and the capacity of him that bestows. Its principle therefore is, according to a well known phrase, to be “no respecter of persons.”

Subject of  
justice :  
mankind.

Considerable light will probably be thrown upon our investigation, if, quitting for the present the political view, we examine justice merely as it exists among individuals. Justice is a rule of conduct originating in the connection of one percipient being with another. A comprehensive maxim which has been laid down upon the subject is, “that we should love our neighbour as ourselves.” But this maxim, though possessing considerable merit as a popular principle, is not modelled with the strictness of philosophical accuracy.

Its distribu-  
tion mea-  
sured by the  
capacity of  
its subject :

In a loose and general view I and my neighbour are both of us men ; and of consequence entitled to equal attention. But, in reality, it is probable that one of us, is a being of more worth and importance than the other. A man is of more worth than a beast ; because, being possessed of higher faculties, he is capable of a more refined and genuine happiness. In the same manner the illustrious archbishop  
of



of Cambray was of more worth than his valet, and there are few of us that would hesitate to pronounce, if his palace were in flames, and the life of only one of them could be preserved, which of the two ought to be preferred.

BOOK II.  
CHAP. II.

But there is another ground of preference, beside the private consideration of one of them being further removed from the state of a mere animal.

by his usefulness.

We are not connected with one or two percipient beings, but with a society, a nation, and in some sense with the whole family of mankind. Of consequence that life ought to be preferred which will be most conducive to the general good. In saving the life of Fenelon, suppose at the moment he conceived the project of his immortal Telemachus, I should have been promoting the benefit of thousands, who have been cured by the perusal of that work, of some error, vice and consequent unhappiness. Nay, my benefit would extend further than this; for every individual, thus cured, has become a better member of society, and has contributed in his turn to the happiness, information and improvement of others.

Suppose I had been myself the valet; I ought to have chosen to die, rather than Fenelon should have died. The life of Fenelon was really preferable to that of the valet. But understanding is the faculty that perceives the truth of this and similar propositions; and justice is the principle that regulates my conduct accordingly. It would have been just

Self-love considered,



BOOK II.  
CHAP. II.Family af-  
fection.

just in the valet to have preferred the archbishop to himself. To have done otherwise would have been a breach of justice\*.

Suppose the valet had been my brother, my father or my benefactor. This would not alter the truth of the proposition. The life of Fenelon would still be more valuable than that of the valet; and justice, pure, unadulterated justice, would still have preferred that which was most valuable. Justice would have taught me to save the life of Fenelon at the expence of the other. What magic is there in the pronoun "my," that should justify us in overturning the decisions of impartial truth? My brother or my father may be a fool or a profligate, malicious, lying or dishonest. If they be, of what consequence is it that they are mine?

Gratitude.

"But to my father I am indebted for existence; he supported me in the helplessness of infancy." When he first subjected himself to the necessity of these cares, he was probably influenced by no particular motives of benevolence to his future offspring. Every voluntary benefit however entitles the bestower to some kindness and retribution. Why? Because a voluntary benefit is an evidence of benevolent intention, that is, in a certain degree, of virtue. It is the disposition of the mind, not the external action separately taken, that entitles

\* The question, how far impartial justice is a motive capable of operating upon the mind, will be found examined at length, Book IV, Chap. X.



to respect. But the merit of this disposition is equal, whether the benefit were conferred upon me or upon another. I and another man cannot both be right in preferring our respective benefactors, for my benefactor cannot be at the same time both better and worse than his neighbour. My benefactor ought to be esteemed, not because he bestowed a benefit upon me, but because he bestowed it upon a human being. His desert will be in exact proportion to the degree, in which that human being was worthy of the distinction conferred.

Thus every view of the subject brings us back to the consideration of my neighbour's moral worth, and his importance to the general weal, as the only standard to determine the treatment to which he is entitled. Gratitude therefore, if by gratitude we understand a sentiment of preference which I entertain towards another, upon the ground of my having been the subject of his benefits, is no part either of justice or virtue\*.

It may be objected, "that my relation, my companion, or my benefactor, will of course in many instances obtain an uncommon portion of my regard: for, not being universally capable of discriminating the comparative worth of different men, I shall inevitably judge most favourably of

Objections  
from ignorance

\* This argument is stated with great clearness, in an Essay on the Nature of True Virtue, by Jonathan Edwards, author of a celebrated work on the Freedom of the Will.



BOOK II.  
CHAP. II.

him, of whose virtues I have received the most unquestionable proofs; and thus shall be compelled to prefer the man of moral worth whom I know, to another who may possess, unknown to me, an essential superiority."

This compulsion however is founded only in the imperfection of human nature. It may serve as an apology for my error, but can never change error into truth. It will always remain contrary to the strict and universal decisions of justice. The difficulty of conceiving this, is owing merely to our confounding the disposition from which an action is chosen, with the action itself. The disposition, that would prefer virtue to vice, and a greater degree of virtue to a less, is undoubtedly a subject of approbation; the erroneous exercise of this disposition, by which a wrong object is selected, if unavoidable, is to be deplored, but can by no colouring and under no denomination be converted into right\*.

from utility.

It may in the second place be objected, "that a mutual commerce of benefits tends to increase the mass of benevolent action, and that to increase the mass of benevolent action is to contribute to the general good." Indeed! Is the general good promoted by falshood, by treating a man of one degree of worth, as if he had ten times that worth? or as if he were in any degree different from what he really is? Would not the most beneficial consequences result from a different plan; from my

\* Chap. IV.

constantly



constantly and carefully enquiring into the deserts of all those with whom I am connected, and from their being sure, after a certain allowance for the fallibility of human judgment, of being treated by me exactly as they deserved? Who can describe the benefits that would result from such a plan of conduct, if universally adopted?

It would perhaps tend to make the truth in this respect more accurately understood, to consider that, whereas the received morality teaches me to be grateful, whether in affection or in act, for benefits conferred on myself, the reasonings here delivered, without removing the tie upon me from personal benefits (except where benefit is conferred from an unworthy motive), multiply the obligation, and enjoin me to be also grateful for benefits conferred upon others. My obligation towards my benefactor, supposing his benefit to be justly conferred, is in no sort dissolved; nor can any thing authorise me to supersede it, but the requisition of a superior duty. That which ties me to my benefactor, upon these principles, is the moral worth he has displayed; and it will frequently happen that I shall be obliged to yield him the preference, because, while other competitors may be of greater worth, the evidence I have of the worth of my benefactor is more complete.

There seems to be more truth, in the argument, derived chiefly from the prevailing modes of social existence, in favour of my providing, in ordinary

An exception  
tion stated.



BOOK II.  
CHAP. II.

cases, for my wife and children, my brothers and relations, before I provide for strangers, than in those which have just been examined. As long as the providing for individuals is conducted with its present irregularity and caprice, it seems as if there must be a certain distribution of the class needing superintendence and supply, among the class affording it; that each man may have his claim and resource. But this argument is to be admitted with great caution. It belongs only to ordinary cases; and cases of a higher order, or a more urgent necessity, will perpetually occur, in competition with which these will be altogether impotent. We must be severely scrupulous in measuring the quantity of supply; and, with respect to money in particular, should remember how little is yet understood of the true mode of employing it for the public benefit.

Remark.

Nothing can be less exposed to reasonable exception than these principles. If there be such a thing as virtue, it must be placed in a conformity to truth, and not to error. It cannot be virtuous, that I should esteem a man, that is, consider him as possessed of estimable qualities, when in reality he is destitute of them. It surely cannot conduce to the benefit of mankind, that each man should have a different standard of moral judgment and preference, and that the standard of all should vary from that of reality. Those who teach this, impose the deepest disgrace upon virtue. They assert in other words, that, when men cease to be deceived, when the



the film is removed from their eyes, and they see things as they are, they will cease to be either good or happy. Upon the system opposite to theirs, the soundest criterion of virtue is, to put ourselves in the place of an impartial spectator, of an angelic nature, suppose, beholding us from an elevated station, and uninfluenced by our prejudices, conceiving what would be his estimate of the intrinsic circumstances of our neighbour, and acting accordingly.

Having considered the persons with whom justice is conversant, let us next enquire into the degree in which we are obliged to consult the good of others. And here, upon the very same reasons, it will follow, that it is just I should do all the good in my power. Does a person in distress apply to me for relief? It is my duty to grant it, and I commit a breach of duty in refusing. If this principle be not of universal application, it is because, in conferring a benefit upon an individual, I may in some instances inflict an injury of superior magnitude upon myself or society. Now the same justice, that binds me to any individual of my fellow men, binds me to the whole. If, while I confer a benefit upon one man, it appear, in striking an equitable balance, that I am injuring the whole, my action ceases to be right, and becomes absolutely wrong. But how much am I bound to do for the general weal, that is, for the benefit of the individuals of whom the whole is composed? Every thing in my power.

Degrees of  
justice.



BOOK II.  
CHAP. II.

To the neglect of the means of my own existence? No; for I am myself a part of the whole. Beside, it will rarely happen that the project of doing for others every thing in my power, will not demand for its execution the preservation of my own existence; or in other words, it will rarely happen that I cannot do more good in twenty years, than in one. If the extraordinary case should occur, in which I can promote the general good by my death more than by my life, justice requires that I should be content to die. In other cases, it will usually be incumbent on me, to maintain my body and mind in the utmost vigour, and in the best condition for service\*.

Suppose, for example, that it is right for one man to possess a greater portion of property than another, whether as the fruit of his industry, or the inheritance of his ancestors. Justice obliges him to regard this property as a trust, and calls upon him maturely to consider in what manner it may be employed for the increase of liberty, knowledge and virtue. He has no right to dispose of a shilling of it at the suggestion of his caprice. So far from being entitled to well earned applause, for having employed some scanty pittance in the service of philanthropy, he is in the eye of justice a delinquent, if he withhold any portion from that service. Could that portion have been better or more worthily employed? That it could, is implied in the very

\* Appendix, No. I. p. 138.



terms of the proposition. Then it was just it should have been so employed.—In the same manner as my property, I hold my person as a trust in behalf of mankind. I am bound to employ my talents, my understanding, my strength and my time, for the production of the greatest quantity of general good. Such are the declarations of justice, so great is the extent of my duty.

But justice is reciprocal. If it be just that I should confer a benefit, it is just that another man should receive it, and, if I withhold from him that to which he is entitled, he may justly complain. My neighbour is in want of ten pounds that I can spare. There is no law of political institution to reach this case, and transfer the property from me to him. But in a passive sense, unless it can be shown that the money can be more beneficently employed, his right is as complete, (though actively he have not the same right, or rather duty, to possess himself of it), as if he had my bond in his possession, or had supplied me with goods to the amount \*.

To this it has sometimes been answered, “that there is more than one person, who stands in need of the money I have to spare, and of consequence I must be at liberty to bestow it as I please.” By no means. If only one person offer himself to my knowledge or search, to me there is but one. Those others that I cannot find, belong to other rich men to assist (every man is in reality rich, who

\* Chap. V.



BOOK II.  
CHAP. II.

has more than his just occasions demand), and not to me. If more than one person offer, I am obliged to balance their claims, and conduct myself accordingly. It is scarcely possible that two men should have an exactly equal claim, or that I should be equally certain respecting the claim of the one as of the other.

It is therefore impossible for me to confer upon any man a favour; I can only do him right. Whatever deviates from the law of justice, though it should be in the too much done in favour of some individual or some part of the general whole, is so much subtracted from the general stock, so much of absolute injustice.

Application.

The reasonings here alleged, are sufficient, clearly to establish the competence of justice as a principle of deduction in all cases of moral enquiry. They are themselves rather of the nature of illustration and example, and, if error be imputable to them in particulars, this will not invalidate the general conclusion, the propriety of applying moral justice as a criterion in the investigation of political truth.

Idea of political justice.

Society is nothing more than an aggregation of individuals. Its claims and duties must be the aggregate of their claims and duties, the one no more precarious and arbitrary than the other. What has the society a right to require from me? The question is already answered: every thing that it is my duty to do. Any thing more? Certainly not. Can it change eternal truth, or subvert the nature of



of men and their actions? Can it make my duty consist in committing intemperance, in maltreating or assassinating my neighbour?—Again, what is it that the society is bound to do for its members? Every thing that is requisite for their welfare. But the nature of their welfare is defined by the nature of mind. That will most contribute to it, which expands the understanding, supplies incitements to virtue, fills us with a generous consciousness of our independence, and carefully removes whatever can impede our exertions.

Should it be affirmed, “that it is not in the power of any political system to secure to us these advantages,” the conclusion will not be less incontrovertible. It is bound to contribute every thing it is able to these purposes. Suppose its influence in the utmost degree limited; there must be one method, approaching nearer than any other to the desired object, and that method ought to be universally adopted. There is one thing that political institutions can assuredly do, they can avoid positively counteracting the true interests of their subjects. But all capricious rules and arbitrary distinctions do positively counteract them. There is scarcely any modification of society but has in it some degree of moral tendency. So far as it produces neither mischief nor benefit, it is good for nothing. So far as it tends to the improvement of the community, it ought to be universally adopted.



*Appendix, No. I. p. 134.*

## OF SUICIDE.

*Motives of suicide : 1. Escape from pain.—2. Benevolence.—Martyrdom considered.*

BOOK II.  
CHAP. II.

*Appendix,*  
No. I.  
Motives of  
suicide.

1. Escape  
from pain.

THIS reasoning will throw some light upon the long disputed case of suicide. “Have I a right to destroy myself in order to escape from pain or distress?” Circumstances that should justify such an action, can rarely occur. There are few situations that can exclude the possibility of future life, vigour and usefulness. It will frequently happen that the man, who once saw nothing before him but despair, shall afterwards enjoy a long period of happiness and honour. In the mean time the power of terminating our own lives, is one of the faculties with which we are endowed; and therefore, like every other faculty, is a subject of moral discipline. In common with every branch of morality, it is a topic of calculation, as to the balance of good and evil to result, from its employment in any individual instance. We should however be scrupulously upon our guard, against the deceptions that melancholy and impatience are so well calculated to impose. We should consider that,



that, though the pain to be suffered by ourselves is by no means to be overlooked, we are but one, and the persons nearly or remotely interested in our possible usefulness innumerable. Each man is but the part of a great system, and all that he has, is so much wealth to be put to the account of the general stock.

BOOK II.  
CHAP. II.

Appendix,  
No. I.

There is another case of suicide of more difficult estimation. What shall we think of the reasoning of Lycurgus, who, when he determined upon a voluntary death, remarked, "that all the faculties a rational being possessed were capable of being benevolently employed, and that, after having spent his life in the service of his country, a man ought, if possible, to render his death a source of additional benefit?" This was the motive of the suicide of Codrus, Leonidas and Decius. If the same motive prevailed in the much admired suicide of Cato, and he were instigated by reasons purely benevolent, it is impossible not to applaud his intention, even if he were mistaken in the application. The difficulty is to decide whether in any instance, the recourse to a voluntary death, can overbalance the usefulness to be displayed, in twenty years of additional life.

2. Benevolence.

Additional importance will be reflected upon this disquisition, if we remember that martyrs [*μαρτυρες*] are suicides by the very signification of the term. They die for a testimony [*μαρτυριον*]. But that would be impossible, if their death were not to a certain

Martyrdom  
considered.



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certain degree a voluntary action. We must assume that it was possible for them to avoid this fate, before we can draw any conclusion from it in favour of the cause they espoused. They were determined to die, rather than reflect dishonour on that cause.

*Appendix, No. II.*

OF DUELLING.

*Motives of duelling.—1. Revenge.—2. Reputation.—  
Objection answered.—Illustration.*

Appendix,  
No. II.

Motives of  
duelling.

IT may be proper in this place to bestow a moment's consideration upon the trite, but very important case of duelling. A short reflection will suffice to set it in its true light.

1. Revenge.

This despicable practice was originally invented by barbarians for the gratification of revenge. It was probably at that time thought a very happy project, for reconciling the odiousness of malignity with the gallantry of courage.

2. Reputation:

But in this light it is now generally given up. Men of the best understanding who lend it their sanction, are unwillingly induced to do so, and engage in single combat merely that their reputation may sustain no slander.



In examining this subject we must proceed upon one of two suppositions. Either the lives of both the persons to be hazarded are worthless, or they are not. In the latter case, the question answers itself, and cannot stand in need of discussion. Useful lives are not to be hazarded, from a view to the partial and contemptible obloquy that may be annexed to the refusal of such a duel, that is, to an act of virtue.

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No. II.

When the duellist tells me, that he, and the person that has offended him, are of no possible worth to the community, I may reasonably conclude that he talks the language of spleen. But, if I take him at his word, is it to be admitted, though he cannot benefit the community, that he should injure it? What would be the consequence, if we allowed ourselves to assail every one, that we thought worthless in the world? In reality, when he talks this language, he deserts the ground of vindicating his injured honour, and shows that his conduct is that of a vindictive and brutalised savage.

“But the refusing a duel is an ambiguous action. Cowards may pretend principle to shelter themselves from a danger they dare not meet.”

*Objection.*

This is partly true and partly false. There are few actions indeed that are not ambiguous, or that with the same general outline may not proceed from different motives. But the manner of doing them, will sufficiently show the principle from which they spring.

*Answered.*

He,



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No. II.  
Illustration.

He, that would break through a received custom because he believes it to be wrong, must no doubt arm himself with fortitude. The point in which we principally fail, is in not accurately understanding our own intentions, and taking care beforehand to purify ourselves from every alloy of weakness and error. He, who comes forward with no other idea but that of rectitude, and who expresses, with the simplicity and firmness which conviction never fails to inspire, the views with which he is penetrated, is in no danger of being mistaken for a coward. If he hesitate, it is because he has not an idea perfectly clear of the sentiment he intends to convey. If he be in any degree embarrassed, it is because he has not a feeling, sufficiently generous and intrepid, of the demerit of the action in which he is urged to engage.

If courage have any intelligible nature, one of its principal fruits must be the daring to speak truth at all times, to all persons, and in every possible situation in which a well informed sense of duty may prescribe it. What is it but the want of courage that should prevent me from saying, "Sir, I will not accept your challenge. Have I injured you? I will readily and without compulsion repair my injustice to the uttermost mite. Have you misconstrued me? State to me the particulars, and doubt not that what is true I will make appear to be true. I should be a notorious criminal, were I to attempt your life, or assist you in an attempt upon mine. What



What compensation will the opinion of the world make, for the recollection of so vile and brutal a proceeding? There is no true applause, but where the heart of him that receives it, beats in unison. There is no censure terrible, while the heart repels it with conscious integrity. I am not the coward, to do a deed that my soul detests, because I cannot endure the scoffs of the mistaken. Loss of reputation is a serious evil. But I will act so, that no man shall suspect me of irresolution and pusillanimity." He that should firmly hold this language, and act accordingly, would soon be acquitted of every dishonourable imputation.

## CHAP. III.

## OF THE EQUALITY OF MANKIND.

*Physical equality. — Objection. — Answers. — Moral equality. — How limited. — Province of political justice.*

THE principles of justice, as explained in the preceding chapter, proceed upon the assumption of the equality of mankind. This equality is either physical or moral. Physical equality may be considered, either as it relates to the strength of the body, or the faculties of the mind.

This part of the subject has been exposed to cavil  
and



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and objection. It has been said, "that the reverse of this equality is the result of our experience. Among the individuals of our species, we actually find that there are not two alike. One man is strong, and another weak. One man is wise, and another foolish. All that exists in the world of the inequality of conditions, is to be traced to this as their source. The strong man possesses power to subdue, and the weak stands in need of an ally to protect. The consequence is inevitable: the equality of conditions is a chimerical assumption, neither possible to be reduced into practice, nor desirable, if it could be so reduced."

Answers.

Upon this statement two observations are to be made. First, this inequality was in its origin infinitely less, than it is at present. In the uncultivated state of man, diseases, effeminacy and luxury were little known; and, of consequence, the strength of every one, much more nearly approached to the strength of his neighbour. In the uncultivated state of man, the understandings of all were limited, their wants, their ideas and their views nearly upon a level. It was to be expected that, in their first departure from this state, great irregularities would introduce themselves; and it is the object of subsequent wisdom and improvement to mitigate these irregularities.

Secondly, notwithstanding the incroachments that have been made upon the equality of mankind, a great and substantial equality remains. There

is



is no such disparity among the human race, as to enable one man to hold several other men in subjection, except so far as they are willing to be subject. All government is founded in opinion. Men at present live under any particular form, because they conceive it their interest to do so. One part indeed of a community or empire, may be held in subjection by force; but this cannot be the personal force of their despot; it must be the force of another part of the community, who are of opinion that it is their interest to support his authority. Destroy this opinion, and the fabric which is built upon it falls to the ground. It follows therefore that all men are essentially independent.—So much for the physical equality.

The moral equality is still less open to reasonable exception. By moral equality I understand, the propriety of applying one unalterable rule of justice to every case that may arise. This cannot be questioned, but upon arguments that would subvert the very nature of virtue. “Equality,” it has been affirmed, “will always be an unintelligible fiction, so long as the capacities of men shall be unequal, and their pretended claims have neither guarantee nor sanction by which they can be enforced\*.” But surely justice is sufficiently intelli-

Moral equality.

\* “On a dit—que nous avons tous les mêmes droits. J’ignore ce que c’est que les mêmes droits, où il y a inégalité de talens ou de force, & nulle garantie, nulle sanction.” Raynal, *Revolution d’Amérique*, p. 34.



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gible in its own nature, abstractedly from the consideration whether it be or be not reduced into practice. Justice has relation to beings endowed with perception, and capable of pleasure and pain. Now it immediately results from the nature of such beings, independently of any arbitrary constitution, that pleasure is agreeable and pain odious, pleasure to be desired and pain to be disapproved. It is therefore just and reasonable that such beings should contribute, so far as it lies in their power, to the pleasure and benefit of each other. Among pleasures, some are more exquisite, more unalloyed and less precarious than others. It is just that these should be preferred.

From these simple principles we may deduce the moral equality of mankind. We are partakers of a common nature, and the same causes that contribute to the benefit of one, will contribute to the benefit of another. Our senses and faculties are of the same denomination. Our pleasures and pains will therefore be alike. We are all of us endowed with reason, able to compare, to judge and to infer. The improvement therefore, which is to be desired for one, is to be desired for another. We shall be provident for ourselves, and useful to each other, in proportion as we rise above the sphere of prejudice. The same independence, the same freedom from any such restraint, as should prevent us from giving the reins to our own understanding, or from uttering, upon all occasions, what-  
I ever



ever we think to be true, will conduce to the improvement of all. There are certain opportunities and a certain situation most advantageous to every human being, and it is just that these should be communicated to all, as nearly as the general economy will permit.

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There is indeed one species of moral inequality, parallel to the physical inequality that has been already described. The treatment to which men are entitled, is to be measured by their merits and their virtues. That country would not be the seat of wisdom and reason, where the benefactor of his species was regarded with no greater degree of complacency than their enemy. But in reality this distinction, so far from being adverse to equality in any tenable sense, is friendly to it, and is accordingly known by the appellation of equity, a term derived from the same origin. Though in some sense an exception, it tends to the same purpose to which the principle itself is indebted for its value. It is calculated to infuse into every bosom an emulation of excellence. The thing really to be desired, is the removing as much as possible arbitrary distinctions, and leaving to talents and virtue the field of exertion unimpaired. We should endeavour to afford to all the same opportunities and the same encouragement, and to render justice the common interest and choice.

How limited.

Province of  
political  
justice.

It should be observed, that the object of this chapter, is barely to present a general outline of the



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principle of equality. The practical inferences that flow from it, must remain to be detailed under subsequent heads of enquiry.

## CHAP. IV.

## OF PERSONAL VIRTUE AND DUTY.

*Of virtuous action.—Of a virtuous agent.—Capacity—in inanimate substances—in man.—Inference.—Of benevolent error.—Nature of vice.—Illustrations.—Mutability of the principle of belief.—Complexity in the operation of motives.—Deduction.—Of duty.—It is never our duty to do wrong.*

## CHAP. IV.

**T**HERE are two subjects, of the utmost importance to a just delineation of the principles of society, which are, on that account, entitled to a separate examination; the duties incumbent on men living in society, and the rights accruing to them. These are merely different modes of expressing the principle of justice, as it shall happen to be considered in its relation to the agent or the patient. Duty is the treatment I am bound to bestow upon others; right is the treatment I am entitled to expect from them. This will more fully appear in the sequel.

First, of personal virtue and duty.

Virtue, like every other term of general science,  
may



may be understood either absolutely, or as the qualification and attribute of a particular being: in other words, it is one thing to enquire whether an action is virtuous, and another to enquire whether a man is virtuous. The former of these questions is considerably simple; the latter is more complex, and will require an examination of several circumstances, before it can be satisfactorily determined.

In the first sense I would define virtue to be any action or actions of an intelligent being, proceeding from kind and benevolent intention, and having a tendency to contribute to general happiness. Thus defined, it distributes itself under two heads; and, in whatever instance either the tendency or the intention is wanting, the virtue is incomplete. An action, however pure may be the intention of the agent, the tendency of which is mischievous, or which shall merely be nugatory and useless in its character, is not a virtuous action. Were it otherwise, we should be obliged to concede the appellation of virtue to the most nefarious deeds of bigots, persecutors and religious assassins, and to the weakest observances of a deluded superstition. Still less does an action, the consequences of which shall be supposed to be in the highest degree beneficial, but which proceeds from a mean, corrupt and degrading motive, deserve the appellation of virtue. A virtuous action is that, of which both the motive and the tendency concur to excite our approbation.

Of virtuous  
action.



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Of a virtuous agent.

Let us proceed from the consideration of the action to that of the agent. Before we can decide upon the degree in which any man is entitled to be denominated virtuous, we must compare his performance with his means. It is not enough, that his conduct is attended with an overbalance of good intention and beneficial results. If it appear that he has scarcely produced the tenth part of that benefit, either in magnitude or extent, which he was capable of producing, it is only in a very limited sense that he can be considered as a virtuous man.

Capacity :

What is it therefore, we are led to enquire, that constitutes the capacity of any man? Capacity is an idea produced in the mind by a contemplation of the assemblage of properties in any substance, and the uses to which a substance so circumstanced may be applied. Thus a given portion of metal, may be formed, at the pleasure of the manufacturer, into various implements, a knife, a razor, a sword, a dozen of coat-buttons, &c. This is one stage of capacity. A second is, when it has already received the form of a knife, and, being dismissed by the manufacturer, falls into the hands of the person who intends it for his private use. By this person it may be devoted to purposes, beneficial, pernicious or idle.—To apply these considerations to the nature of a human being.

in inanimate substances :

in man.

We are not here enquiring respecting the capacity of man absolutely speaking, but of an individual; the performer of a given action, or the person



son who has engaged in a certain series of conduct. In the same manner therefore as the knife may be applied to various purposes at the pleasure of its possessor, so an individual endowed with certain qualifications, may engage in various pursuits, according to the views that are presented to him, and the motives that actuate his mind.

Human capacity however, is a subject attended with greater ambiguity than the capacity of inanimate substances. Capacity assumes something as fixed, and enquires into the temporary application of these permanent qualities. But it is easier to define, with tolerable precision, the permanent qualities, of an individual knife, for example, than of an individual man. Every thing in man may be said to be in a state of flux; he is a Proteus whom we know not how to detain. That of which I am capable, for instance, as to my conduct to-day, falls extremely short of that of which I am capable, as to my conduct in the two or three next ensuing years. For what I shall do to-day I am dependent upon my ignorance in some things, my want of practice in others, and the erroneous habits I may in any respect have contracted. But many of these disadvantages may be superseded, when the question is respecting what I shall produce in the two or three next years of my life. Nor is this all. Even my capacity of to-day, is in a great degree determinable by the motives that shall excite me. When a man is placed in circumstances of a very



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Inference.

strong and impressive nature, he is frequently found to possess or instantaneously to acquire, capacities which neither he nor his neighbours previously suspected. We are obliged however in the decisions of morality to submit to these uncertainties. It is only after having formed the most accurate notions we are able respecting the capacity of a man, and comparing this capacity with his performance, that we can decide, with any degree of satisfaction, whether he is entitled to the appellation of virtuous.

Of benevolent error.

There is another difficulty which adheres to this question. Is it the motive alone that we are entitled to take into consideration, when we decide upon the merits of the individual, or are we obliged, as in the case of virtue absolutely taken, to consider both the motives and the tendency of his conduct? The former of these has been frequently asserted. But the assertion is attended with serious difficulties.

Nature of vice.

First, vice as it is commonly understood, is, so far as regards the motive, purely negative. To virtue it is necessary, that it proceed from kind and benevolent intention; but malevolence, or a disposition to draw a direct gratification from the sufferings of others, is not necessary to vice. It is sufficient that the agent regards with neglect those benevolent considerations which are allied to general good. This mode of applying the terms of morality, seems to arise from the circumstance, that, in estimating the merits of others, we reasonably regard the actual benefit or mischief that is produced as  
the



the principal point; and consider the disposition that produces it, merely as it tends to insure to us a continuation of benefit or injury.

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Secondly, actions in the highest degree injurious to the public, have often proceeded from motives uncommonly conscientious. The most determined political assassins, Clement, Ravallac, Damiens and Gerard, seem to have been deeply penetrated with anxiety for the eternal welfare of mankind. For these objects they sacrificed their ease, and cheerfully exposed themselves to tortures and death. Benevolence probably had its part in lighting the fires of Smithfield, and pointing the daggers of Saint Bartholomew. The authors of the Gunpowder Treason were, in general, men remarkable for the sanctity of their lives, and the austerity of their manners.

Illustrations.

The nature whether of religious imposture, or of persevering enterprise in general, seems scarcely to have been sufficiently developed by the professors of moral enquiry. Nothing is more difficult, than for a man to recommend with enthusiasm, that which he does not think intrinsically admirable. Nothing is more difficult, than for a man to engage in an arduous undertaking, that he does not persuade himself will in some way be extensively useful. When archbishop Becket set himself against the whole power of Henry the second, and bore every species of contumely with an unalterable spirit, we may easily discover the haughtiness of



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of the priest, the insatiable ambition that delighted to set its foot upon the neck of kings, and the immeasurable vanity that snuffed with transport the incense of an adoring multitude; but we may see with equal evidence, that he regarded himself as the champion of the cause of God, and expected the crown of martyrdom in a future state.

Mutability  
of the prin-  
ciple of be-  
lief.

Precipitate and superficial judges conclude, that he who imposes upon others, is in most cases aware of the delusion himself. But this seldom happens. Self-deception is of all things the most easy. Whoever ardently wishes to find a proposition true, may be expected insensibly to veer towards the opinion that suits his inclination. It cannot be wondered at, by him who considers the subtlety of the human mind\*, that belief should scarcely ever rest upon the mere basis of evidence, and that arguments are always viewed through a delusive medium, magnifying them into Alps, or diminishing them to nothing.

Complexity  
in the ope-  
ration of  
motives.

In the same manner as the grounds of our opinions are complicated, so are the motives to our actions. It is probable that no wrong action is perpetrated from motives entirely pure. It is probable that conscientious assassins and persecutors, have some mixture of ambition or the love of fame, and some feelings of animosity and ill will. But the deception they put upon themselves may nevertheless be complete. They stand acquitted at the

\* Book I, Chap. V, p. 68.



bar of their own examination; and their injurious conduct, if considered under the head of motive only, is probably as pure, as much of that conduct which falls with the best title under the denomination of virtue.

For, thirdly, those actions of men, which tend to increase the general happiness, and are founded in the purest motives, have some alloy in the causes from which they proceed. It has been seen, that the motives of each single action, in a man already arrived at maturity, are innumerable\*: into this mixture it is scarcely to be supposed, that something improper, mean, and inconsistent with that impartial estimate of things which is the true foundation of virtue, will not insinuate itself. It seems reasonable to believe, that such actions, as are known most admirably to have contributed to the benefit of mankind, have sprung from views, of all others the least adulterated. But it cannot be doubted that many actions, considerably useful, and to a great degree well intended, have had as much alloy in their motive, as other actions which, springing from a benevolent disposition, have been extensively detrimental.

From all these considerations it appears, that, if we were to adjust the standard of virtue from intention alone, we should reverse all the received ideas respecting it, giving the palm to some of the greatest pests of mankind, at the expence of others

Deduction.

\* Book I, Chap. V, p. 68.

who



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CHAP. IV.

who have been no contemptible benefactors. Intention no doubt is of the essence of virtue. But it will not do alone. In deciding the merits of others, we are bound, for the most part, to proceed in the same manner, as in deciding the merits of inanimate substances. The turning point is their utility. Intention is of no further value than as it leads to utility: it is the means, and not the end. We shall overturn therefore every principle of just reasoning, if we bestow our applause upon the most mischievous of mankind, merely because the mischief they produce arises from mistake; or if we regard them in any other light, than we would an engine of destruction and misery, that is constructed of very costly materials.

## Of duty.

The reasonings of the early part of this chapter upon the subject of virtue, may equally be applied to elucidate the term duty. Duty is that mode of action on the part of the individual, which constitutes the best possible application of his capacity to the general benefit. The only distinction to be made, between what was there adduced upon the subject of personal virtue, and the observations which most aptly apply to the consideration of duty, consists in this: that, though a man should in some instances neglect the best application of his capacity, he may yet be entitled to the appellation of virtuous; but duty is uniform, and requires of us that best application in every situation that presents itself.

## It is never

This way of considering the subject furnishes us  
with



with the solution of a question, which has been supposed to be attended with considerable difficulty. Is it my duty to comply with the dictates of my erroneous conscience? Was it the duty of Everard Digby to blow up king James and his parliament with gunpowder? Certainly not. Duty is the application of capacity to the real, not imaginary, benefit of mankind. It was his duty to entertain a sincere and ardent desire for the improvement and happiness of others. With this duty he probably complied. But it was not his duty to apply that desire to a purpose, dreadful, and pregnant with inexhaustible mischief. With the prejudices he entertained, perhaps it was impossible for him to do otherwise. But it would be absurd to say that it was his duty to labour under prejudice. Perhaps it will be found that no man can in any instance act otherwise than he does\*. But this, if true, will not annihilate the meaning of the term duty. It has already been seen, that the idea of capacity and the best application of capacity, is equally intelligible of inanimate substances. Duty is a species under this generical term, and implies merely the best application of capacity in an intelligent being, whether that application originate in a self-moving power, or in the irresistible impulse of motives and considerations presented to the understanding. To talk of the duty of doing wrong, can answer no other purpose than to take away all precision and meaning from language.

\* Book IV, Chap. VII.



## CHAP. V.

## OF RIGHTS.

*Active rights exploded.—Province of morality unlimited.—Objection.—Consequences of the doctrine of active rights.—Admonition considered.—Rights of kings—of communities.—Passive rights irrefragable.—Of discretion.*

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CHAP. V.

THE rights of man have, like many other political and moral questions, furnished a topic of eager and pertinacious dispute, more by a confused and inaccurate statement of the subject of enquiry, than by any considerable difficulty attached to the subject itself.

The real or supposed rights of man are of two kinds, active and passive; the right in certain cases to do as we list; and the right we possess to the forbearance or assistance of other men.

Active  
rights ex-  
ploded.

The first of these a just philosophy will probably induce us universally to explode.

There is no sphere in which a human being can be supposed to act, where one mode of proceeding will not, in every given instance, be more reasonable than any other mode. That mode the being is bound by every principle of justice to pursue.

Morality



Morality is nothing else but that system, which teaches us to contribute upon all occasions, to the extent of our power, to the well-being and happiness of every intellectual and sensitive existence. But there is no action of our lives, which does not in some way affect that happiness. Our property, our time, and our faculties, may all of them be made to contribute to this end. The periods, which cannot be spent in the active production of happiness, may be spent in preparation. There is not one of our avocations or amusements, that does not, by its effects, render us more or less fit to contribute our quota to the general utility. If then every one of our actions fall within the province of morals, it follows that we have no rights in relation to the selecting them. No one will maintain, that we have a right to trespass upon the dictates of morality.

It has been observed by natural philosophers, that a single grain of sand more or less in the structure of the earth, would have produced an infinite variation in its history. If this be true in inanimate nature, it is much more so in morals. The encounter of two persons of opposite sexes, so as to lead to the relation of marriage, in many cases obviously depends upon the most trivial circumstances, any one of which being changed, the relation would not have taken place. Let the instance be the father and mother of Shakespear. If they had not been connected, Shakespear would never have been born.



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born. If any accident had happened to the wife during her pregnancy, if she had on any day set her foot half an inch too far and fallen down a flight of stairs, if she had turned down one street instead of another, through which, it may be, some hideous object was passing, Shakespear might never have come alive into the world. The determination of mind, in consequence of which the child contracts some of his earliest propensities, which call out his curiosity, industry and ambition, or on the other hand leave him unobserving, indolent and phlegmatic, is produced by circumstances so minute and subtle, as in few instances to have been made the subject of history. The events which afterwards produce his choice of a profession or pursuit, are not less precarious. Every one of these incidents, when it occurred, grew out of a series of incidents that had previously taken place. Every thing is connected in the universe. If any man asserted that, if Alexander had not bathed in the river Cydnus, Shakespear would never have written, it would be impossible to prove that his assertion was untrue.

## Objection.

To the inference we are deducing from this statement of facts, it may be objected, "that it is true that all events in the universe are connected, and that the most memorable revolutions may depend for their existence upon trivial causes; but it is impossible for us to discern the remote bearings and subtle influences of our own actions; and by what



what we cannot discern it can never be required of us to regulate our conduct." This is no doubt true, but its force in the nature of an objection will be taken away, if we consider, first, that, though our ignorance will justify us in neglecting that which, had we been better informed, we should have seen to be most beneficial, it can scarcely be considered as conferring on us an absolute right to incur that neglect. Secondly, even under the limited powers of our discernment, it will seldom happen to a man eminently conscientious and benevolent, to see no appearance of superiority, near or remote, direct or indirect, in favour of one side of any alternative proposed to his choice, rather than the other. We are bound to regulate ourselves by the best judgment we can exert. Thirdly, if any thing remain to the active rights of man after this deduction, and if he be at liberty to regulate his conduct in any instance, independently of the dictates of morality, it will be, first, an imperfect, not an absolute right, the offspring of ignorance and imbecility; and, secondly, it will relate only to such insignificant matters, if such there be, as, after the best exercise of human judgment, cannot be discerned to have the remotest relation to the happiness of mankind.

Few things have contributed more to undermine the energy and virtue of the human species, than the supposition that we have a right, as it has been phrased, to do what we will with our own. It is

Consequences of the doctrine of active rights.



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thus that the miser, who accumulates to no end that which diffused would have conduced to the welfare of thousands, that the luxurious man, who wallows in indulgence and sees numerous families around him pining in beggary, never fail to tell us of their rights, and to silence animadversion and quiet the censure of their own minds, by observing, “that they came fairly into possession of their wealth, that they owe no debts, and that of consequence no man has authority to enquire into their private manner of disposing of that which appertains to them.” We have in reality nothing that is strictly speaking our own. We have nothing that has not a destination prescribed to it by the immutable voice of reason and justice; and respecting which, if we supersede that destination, we do not entail upon ourselves a certain portion of guilt.

Admonition  
considered.

As we have a duty obliging us to a certain conduct respecting our faculties and our possessions, so our neighbour has a duty respecting his admonitions and advice. He is guilty of an omission in this point, if he fail to employ every means in his power for the amendment of our errors, and to have recourse for that purpose, as he may see occasion, to the most unreserved animadversion upon our propensities and conduct. It is absurd to suppose that certain points are especially within my province, and therefore he may not afford me, invited or uninvited, his assistance in arriving at a right decision. He is bound to form the best judgment he is able, respecting



respecting every circumstance that falls under his observation ; what he thinks, he is bound to declare to others ; and, if to others, certainly not less to the party immediately concerned. The worst consequences, through every rank and department of life, have arisen, from men's supposing their personal affairs in any case to be so sacred, that every one, except themselves, was bound to be blind and dumb in relation to them.

The ground of this error has been a propensity, to which we are frequently subject, of concluding from the excess to the thing itself. Undoubtedly our neighbour is to be directed in his animadversions, not by a spirit of levity and impertinence, but by a calculation of the eventual utility. Undoubtedly there is one person who must, in almost all instances, be the real actor, and other persons may not, but with caution and sober reflection, occupy his time with their suggestions as to the conduct he ought to pursue. There is scarcely any tyranny more gross, than that of the man who should perpetually intrude upon us his crude and half-witted advices, or who, not observing when, in point of strength and clearness, he had done justice to his own conception, should imagine it to be his duty to repeat and press it upon us without end. Advice perhaps requires above all things, that it should be administered with simplicity, disinterestedness, kindness and moderation. —To return.



BOOK II.  
CHAP. V.Rights of  
kings :

It has been affirmed by the zealous advocates of liberty, “that princes and magistrates have no rights;” and no position can be more incontrovertible. There is no situation of their lives that has not its correspondent duties. There is no power intrusted to them, that they are not bound to exercise exclusively for the public good. It is strange that persons adopting this principle, did not go a step further, and perceive that the same restrictions were applicable to subjects and citizens.

of commu-  
nities.

It is scarcely necessary to add, that, if individuals have no rights, neither has society, which possesses nothing but what individuals have brought into a common stock. The absurdity of the common opinion, as applied to this subject, is still more glaring, if possible, than in the view in which we have already considered it. According to the usual sentiment, every club assembling for any civil purpose, every congregation of religionists assembling for the worship of God, has a right to establish any provisions or ceremonies, no matter how ridiculous or detestable, provided they do not interfere with the freedom of others. Reason lies prostrate at their feet; they have a right to trample upon and insult her as they please. It is in the same spirit we have been told, that every nation has a right to choose its form of government. An acute and original author was probably misled by the vulgar phraseology on this subject, when he asserted, that, “at a time when neither the people  
of



of France nor the national assembly were troubling themselves about the affairs of England or the English parliament, Mr. Burke's conduct was unpardonable in commencing an unprovoked attack upon them\*."

It is, no doubt, the inevitable result of human imperfection, that men and societies of men should model their conduct by the best judgment they are able to form, whether that judgment be sound or erroneous. But, as it has been before shown that it cannot be their duty to do any thing detrimental to the general happiness †, so it appears with equal evidence that they cannot have a right to do so. There cannot be a more absurd proposition, than that which affirms the right of doing wrong. A mistake of this sort, has been attended with the most pernicious consequences in public and political affairs. It cannot be too strongly inculcated, that societies and communities of men are in no case empowered to establish absurdity and injustice; that the voice of the people is not, as has sometimes been ridiculously asserted, "the voice of truth and of God;" and that universal consent cannot convert wrong into right. The most insignificant individual ought to hold himself free to animadvert upon the decisions of the most august assembly; and other men are bound in justice to listen to him, in proportion to the soundness of his reasons, and the strength of his remarks, and not

\* Rights of Man, page 1. † Chap. IV, p. 157.



BOOK II.  
CHAP. V.

for any accessory advantages he may derive from rank or exterior importance. The most crowded forum, or the most venerable senate, cannot make one proposition to be a rule of justice, that was not substantially so, previously to their decision. They can only interpret and announce that law, which derives its real validity from a higher and less mutable authority. If we submit to their decisions in cases where we are not convinced of their rectitude, this submission is an affair of prudence only; a reasonable man will lament the emergence, while he yields to the necessity. If a congregation of men agree universally to cut off their right hand, to shut their ears upon free enquiry, or to affirm two and two upon a particular occasion to be sixteen, in all these cases they are wrong, and ought unequivocally to be censured for usurping an authority that does not belong to them. They ought to be told, "Gentlemen, you are not, as in the intoxication of power you have been led to imagine, omnipotent; there is an authority greater than yours, to which you are bound assiduously to conform yourselves." No man, if he were alone in the world, would have a right to make himself impotent or miserable.

Passive  
rights irre-  
fragable.

So much for the active rights of man, which, if there be any cogency in the preceding arguments, are all of them superseded and rendered null by the superior claims of justice. His passive rights, when freed from the ambiguity that has arisen



arisen from the improper mixture and confounding of these two heads, will probably be found liable to little controversy.

BOOK II.  
CHAP. V.

In the first place he is said to have a right to life and personal liberty. This proposition, if admitted, must be admitted with great limitation. He has no right to his life, when his duty calls him to resign it. Other men are bound [it would be improper in strictness of speech, upon the ground of the preceding explanations, to say they have a right] to deprive him of life or liberty, if that should appear in any case to be indispensibly necessary to prevent a greater evil. The passive rights of man will be best understood from the following elucidation.

Every man has a certain sphere of discretion, which he has a right to expect shall not be infringed by his neighbours. This right flows from the very nature of man. First, all men are fallible: no man can be justified in setting up his judgment as a standard for others. We have no infallible judge of controversies; each man in his own apprehension is right in his decisions; and we can find no satisfactory mode of adjusting their jarring pretensions. If every one be desirous of imposing his sense upon others, it will at last come to be a controversy, not of reason, but of force. Secondly, even if we had an infallible criterion, nothing would be gained, unless it were by all men recognised as such. If I were secured against the possi-

Of discre-  
tion.



BOOK II.  
CHAP. V.

bility of mistake, mischief and not good would accrue, from imposing my infallible truths upon my neighbour, and requiring his submission independently of any conviction I could produce in his understanding. Man is a being who can never be an object of just approbation, any further than he is independent. He must consult his own reason, draw his own conclusions, and conscientiously conform himself to his ideas of propriety. Without this, he will be neither active, nor considerate, nor resolute, nor generous.

For these two reasons it is necessary, that every man should stand by himself, and rest upon his own understanding. For that purpose each must have his sphere of discretion. No man must encroach upon my province, nor I upon his. He may advise me, moderately and without pertinaciousness, but he must not expect to dictate to me. He may censure me freely and without reserve; but he should remember that I am to act by my deliberation and not his. He may exercise a republican boldness in judging, but he must not be peremptory and imperious in prescribing. Force may never be resorted to, but in the most extraordinary and imperious emergency. I ought to exercise my talents for the benefit of others; but that exercise must be the fruit of my own conviction; no man must attempt to press me into the service. I ought to appropriate such part of the fruits of the earth, as by any accident comes into



into my possession, and is not necessary to my benefit, to the use of others; but they must obtain it from me by argument and expostulation, not by violence. It is in this principle, that what is commonly called the right of property is founded. Whatever then comes into my possession, without violence to any other man, or to the institutions of society, is my property. This property, it appears by the principles already laid down, I have no right to dispose of at my caprice; every shilling of it is appropriated by the laws of morality; but no man can be justified, in ordinary cases at least, in forcibly extorting it from me. When the laws of morality shall be clearly understood, their excellence universally apprehended, and themselves seen to be coincident with each man's private advantage, the idea of property in this sense will remain, but no man will have the least desire, for purposes of ostentation or luxury, to possess more than his neighbours.

A second branch of the passive rights of man, consists in the right each man possesses to the assistance of his neighbour. This will be fully elucidated hereafter\*.

\* Vol. II, Book VIII.



## C H A P. VI.

## OF THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

*Foundation of virtue.—Human actions regulated :  
 1. by the nature of things.—2. by positive institution.—Tendency of the latter : 1. to excite virtue.—Its equivocal character in this respect.—2. to inform the judgment.—Its inaptitude for that purpose.—Province of conscience considered.—Tendency of an interference with that province.—Unsuitableness of punishment—either to impress new sentiments—or to strengthen old ones.—Recapitulation.*

BOOK II.  
 CHAP. VI.

**I**T has appeared, that the most essential of those rights which constitute the peculiar sphere appropriate to each individual, and the right upon which every other depends as its basis, is the right of private judgment. It will therefore be of use to say something distinctly on this head.

Foundation  
 of virtue.

To a rational being there can be but one rule of conduct, justice, and one mode of ascertaining that rule, the exercise of his understanding.

If in any instance I am made the mechanical instrument of absolute violence, in that instance I fall under a pure state of external slavery. If on the other hand, not being under the influence of absolute compulsion, I am wholly prompted by something



something that is frequently called by that name, and act from the hope of reward or the fear of punishment, the subjection I suffer is doubtless less aggravated, but the effect upon my moral habits may be in a still higher degree injurious.

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In the mean time, with respect to the conduct I should observe upon such occasions, a distinction is to be made. Justice, as it was defined in a preceding chapter, is coincident with utility. I am myself a part of the great whole, and my happiness is a part of that complex view of things by which justice is regulated. The hope of reward therefore, and the fear of punishment, however wrong in themselves, and inimical to the improvement of the mind, are motives which, so long as they are resorted to in society, must and ought to have some influence with my mind.

There are two descriptions of tendency that may belong to any action, the tendency which it possesses by the necessary and unalterable laws of existence, and the tendency which results from the arbitrary interference of some intelligent being. The nature of happiness and misery, pleasure and pain, is independent of positive institution. It is immutably true, that whatever tends to procure a balance of the former is to be desired, and whatever tends to procure a balance of the latter is to be rejected. In like manner there are certain features and principles inseparable from such a being as man; there are causes which, in their operation upon

Human actions regulated, i. by the nature of things:



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CHAP. VI.

upon him, are in their own nature generative of pleasure, and some of a pleasure more excellent than others. Every action has a result which may be said to be peculiarly its own, and which will always follow upon it, unless so far as it may happen to be superseded by the operation of other and extrinsical causes.

2. by positive institution.

Tendency of the latter :

1. to excite virtue.

Its equivocal character in this respect.

The tendency of positive institution is of two sorts, to furnish an additional motive to the practice of virtue or right ; and to inform the understanding, as to what actions are right, and what actions are wrong. Much cannot be said in commendation of either of these tendencies.

First, positive institution may furnish an additional motive to the practice of virtue. I have an opportunity of essentially contributing to the advantage of twenty individuals ; they will be benefited, and no other persons will sustain a material injury. I ought to embrace this opportunity. Here let us suppose positive institution to interfere, and to annex some great personal reward to the discharge of my duty. This immediately changes the nature of the action. Before, I preferred it for its intrinsic excellence. Now, so far as the positive institution operates, I prefer it, because some person has arbitrarily annexed to it a great weight of self-interest. But virtue, considered as the quality of an intelligent being, depends upon the disposition with which the action is accompanied. Under a positive institution then, this very action, which



which is intrinsically virtuous, may, so far as relates to the agent, become vicious. The vicious man would before have neglected the advantage of these twenty individuals, because he would not bring a certain inconvenience or trouble upon himself. The same man, with the same disposition, will now promote their advantage, because his own welfare is concerned in it. Twenty, other things equal, is twenty times better than one. He that is not governed by the moral arithmetic of the case, or who acts from a disposition directly at war with that arithmetic; is unjust \*. In other words, moral improvement will be forwarded, in proportion as we are exposed to no other influence, than that of the tendency which belongs to an action by the necessary and unalterable laws of existence. This is probably the meaning of the otherwise vague and obscure principle, “that we should do good, regardless of the consequences;” and by that other, “that we may not do evil, from the prospect of good to result from it.” The case would have been rendered still more glaring, if, instead of the welfare of twenty, we had supposed the welfare of millions to have been concerned. In reality, whether the disparity be great or small, the inference must be the same.

Secondly, positive institution may inform the understanding, as to what actions are right, and what actions are wrong. Here it may be of ad-

2. to inform  
the judg-  
ment.  
Its inapti-  
tude for that  
purpose.

\* Book IV, Chap. X.

vantage



BOOK II.  
CHAP. VI.

vantage to us to reflect upon the terms understanding and information. Understanding, particularly as it is concerned with moral subjects, is the percipient of truth. This is its proper sphere. Information, so far as it is genuine, is a portion detached from the great body of truth. You inform me, "that Euclid asserts the three angles of a plane triangle to be equal to two right angles." Still I am unacquainted with the truth of this proposition. "But Euclid has demonstrated it. His demonstration has existed for two thousand years, and, during that term, has proved satisfactory to every man by whom it has been understood." I am nevertheless uninformed. The knowledge of truth, lies in the perceived agreement or disagreement of the terms of a proposition. So long as I am unacquainted with the middle term by means of which they may be compared, so long as they are incommensurate to my understanding, you may have furnished me with a principle from which I may reason truly to further consequences; but, as to the principle itself, I may strictly be said to know nothing.

Every proposition has an intrinsic evidence of its own. Every consequence has premises from which it flows; and upon them, and not upon any thing else, its validity depends. If you could work a miracle to prove, "that the three angles of a triangle were equal to two right angles," I should still know, that the proposition had been either  
true



true or false previously to the exhibition of the miracle; and that there was no necessary connection between any one of its terms and the miracle exhibited. The miracle would take off my attention from the true question, to a question altogether different, that of authority. By the authority adduced I might be prevailed on to yield an irregular assent to the proposition; but I could not properly be said to perceive its truth.

But this is not all. If it were, it might perhaps be regarded as a refinement foreign to the concerns of human life. Positive institutions do not content themselves with requiring my assent to certain propositions, in consideration of the testimony by which they are enforced. This would amount to no more, than advice flowing from a respectable quarter, which, after all, I might reject, if it did not accord with the mature judgment of my own understanding. But in the very nature of these institutions there is included a sanction, a motive either of punishment or reward, to induce me to obedience.

It is commonly said, “that positive institutions ought to leave me free in matters of conscience, but may properly interfere with my conduct in civil concerns.” But this distinction seems to have been very lightly taken up. What sort of moralist must he be, whose conscience is silent as to what passes in his intercourse with other men? Such a distinction proceeds upon the supposition,  
“that

Province of  
conscience  
considered.



BOOK II.  
CHAP. VI.

“that it is of great consequence whether I bow to the east or the west ; whether I call the object of my worship Jehovah or Alla ; whether I pay a priest in a surplice or a black coat. These are points in which an honest man ought to be rigid and inflexible. But as to those other, whether he shall be a tyrant, a slave or a free citizen ; whether he shall bind himself with multiplied oaths impossible to be performed, or be a rigid observer of truth ; whether he shall swear allegiance to a king *de jure* or a king *de facto*, to the best or the worst of all possible governments ; respecting these points he may safely commit his conscience to the keeping of the civil magistrate.” In reality, by as many instances as I act contrary to the unbiassed dictate of my own judgment, by so much I abdicate the most valuable part of the character of man.

Tendency  
of an inter-  
ference with  
that pro-  
vince.

I am satisfied at present, that a certain conduct, suppose it be a rigid attention to the confidence of private conversation, is incumbent on me. You tell me, “there are certain cases of such peculiar emergency as to supersede this rule.” Perhaps I think there are not. If I admit your proposition, a wide field of enquiry is opened, respecting what cases do or do not deserve to be considered as exceptions. It is little likely that we should agree respecting all these cases. How then does the law treat me, for my conscientious discharge of what I conceive to be my duty ? Because I will not turn informer (which, it may be, I think an infamous character)



character) against my most valued friend, the law accuses me of misprision of treason, felony, or murder, and perhaps hangs me. I believe a certain individual to be a confirmed villain and a most dangerous member of society, and feel it to be my duty to warn others, perhaps the public, against the effect of his vices. Because I publish what I know to be true, the law convicts me of libel, *scandalum magnatum*, and crimes of I know not what complicated denomination.

If the evil stopped here, it would be well. If I only suffered a certain calamity, suppose death, I could endure it. Death has hitherto been the common lot of men, and I expect, at some time or other, to submit to it. Human society must, sooner or later, be deprived of its individual members, whether they be valuable, or whether they be inconsiderable. But the punishment acts, not only retrospectively upon me, but prospectively upon my contemporaries and countrymen. My neighbour entertains the same opinion respecting the conduct he ought to hold, as I did. The executioner of public justice however interposes with a powerful argument, to convince him that he has mistaken the path of abstract rectitude.

What sort of converts will be produced by this unfeeling logic? "I have deeply reflected," suppose, "upon the nature of virtue, and am convinced that a certain proceeding is incumbent on me. But the hangman, supported by an act of



BOOK II.  
CHAP. VI.

parliament, assures me I am mistaken." If I yield my opinion to his *dictum*, my action becomes modified, and my character also. An influence like this, is inconsistent with all generous magnanimity of spirit, all ardent impartiality in the discovery of truth, and all inflexible perseverance in its assertion. Countries, exposed to the perpetual interference of decrees, instead of arguments, exhibit within their boundaries the mere phantoms of men. We can never judge from an observation of their inhabitants, what men would be, if they knew of no appeal from the tribunal of conscience, and if, whatever they thought, they dared to speak, and dared to act.

At present there will perhaps occur to the majority of readers, but few instances of laws, which may be supposed to interfere with the conscientious discharge of duty. A considerable number will occur in the course of the present enquiry. More would readily offer themselves to a patient research. Men are so successfully reduced to a common standard by the operation of positive law, that, in most countries, they are capable of little more than, like parrots, repeating what others have said. This uniformity is capable of being produced in two ways, by energy of mind and indefatigableness of enquiry, enabling a considerable number to penetrate with equal success into the recesses of truth; and by pusillanimity of temper, and a frigid indifference to right and wrong, produced by the penalties



nalties which are suspended over such as shall disinterestedly enquire, and communicate and act upon the result of their enquiries. It is easy to perceive which of these, is the cause of the uniformity that prevails in the present instance.

BOOK II.  
CHAP. VI.

One thing more in inforcement of this important consideration. "I have done something," suppose, "which though wrong in itself, I believe to be right; or I have done something which I usually admit to be wrong; but my conviction upon the subject is not so clear and forcible, as to prevent my yielding to a powerful temptation." There can be no doubt, that the proper way of conveying to my understanding a truth of which I am ignorant, or of impressing upon me a firmer persuasion of a truth with which I am acquainted, is by an appeal to my reason. Even an angry expostulation with me upon my conduct, will but excite similar passions in me, and cloud, instead of illuminate, my understanding. There is certainly a way of expressing truth, with such benevolence as to command attention, and such evidence as to inforce conviction in all cases whatever.

Unsuitable-  
ness of pu-  
nishment:

Punishment inevitably excites in the sufferer, and ought to excite, a sense of injustice. Let its purpose be, to convince me of the truth of a position, which I at present believe to be false. It is not, abstractedly considered, of the nature of an argument, and therefore it cannot begin with producing conviction. Punishment is a comparatively

either to  
impress new  
sentiments:



BOOK II.  
CHAP. VI.

specious name; but is in reality nothing more than force put upon one being, by another who happens to be stronger. But strength apparently does not constitute justice. The case of punishment, in the view in which we now consider it, is the case of you and me differing in opinion, and your telling me that you must be right, since you have a more brawny arm, or have applied your mind more to the acquiring skill in your weapons than I have.

or to  
strengthen  
old ones.

But let us suppose, "that I am convinced of my error, but that my conviction is superficial and fluctuating, and the object you propose is to render it durable and profound." Ought it to be thus durable and profound? There are no doubt arguments and reasons calculated to render it so. Is the subject in reality problematical, and do you wish by the weight of your blows, to make up for the deficiency of your logic? This can never be defended. An appeal to force must appear to both parties, in proportion to the soundness of their understanding, to be a confession of imbecility. He that has recourse to it, would have no occasion for this expedient, if he were sufficiently acquainted with the powers of that truth it is his office to communicate. If there be any man who, in suffering punishment, is not conscious of injury, he must have had his mind previously debased by slavery, and his sense of moral right and wrong blunted by a series of oppressions.

If



If there be any truth more unquestionable than the rest, it is, that every man is bound to the exertion of his faculties in the discovery of right, and to the carrying into effect all the right with which he is acquainted. It may be granted, that an infallible standard, if it could be discovered, would be considerably beneficial. But this infallible standard itself would be of little use in human affairs, unless it had the property of reasoning as well as deciding, of enlightening the mind as well as constraining the body. If a man be in some cases obliged to prefer his own judgment, he is in all cases obliged to consult that judgment, before he can determine whether the matter in question be of the sort provided for or no. So that from this reasoning it ultimately appears, that the conviction of a man's individual understanding, is the only legitimate principle, imposing on him the duty of adopting any species of conduct.

Such are the genuine principles of human society. Such would be the unconstrained condition of its members, in a state, where every individual within the society, and every neighbour without, was capable of listening with sobriety to the dictates of reason. We shall not fail to be impressed with considerable regret, if, when we descend to the present mixed characters of mankind, we find ourselves obliged in any degree to depart from so simple and grand a principle. The



BOOK II.  
CHAP. VI.

universal exercise of private judgment is a doctrine so unspeakably beautiful, that the true politician will certainly feel infinite reluctance in admitting the idea of interfering with it. A principal object in the subsequent stages of enquiry, will be to discuss the emergency of the cases, that may be thought to demand this interference.

ENQUIRY



E N Q U I R Y  
CONCERNING  
P O L I T I C A L J U S T I C E.

B O O K III.

PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT.

C H A P. I.

SYSTEMS OF POLITICAL WRITERS.

*The question stated.—First hypothesis : government founded in superior strength.—Second hypothesis : government jure divino.—Third hypothesis : the social contract.—The first hypothesis examined.—The second.—Criterion of divine right : 1. patriarchal descent—2. justice.*

HAVING in the preceding book attempted a general delineation of the principles of rational society, it is proper that we, in the next place, proceed to the topic of government.

It has hitherto been the persuasion of communi-



BOOK III.  
CHAP. I.The ques-  
tion stated.

ties of men in all ages and countries, that there are occasions, in which it becomes necessary, to supersede private judgment, for the sake of public good, and to control the acts of the individual, by an act to be performed in the name of the whole.

Previously to our deciding upon this question, it will be of advantage to enquire into the nature of government, and the manner in which this control may be exercised, with the smallest degree of violence and usurpation in regard to the individual. This point being determined, will assist us finally to ascertain, both the quantity of evil which government in its best form involves, and the urgency of the case which has been supposed to demand its interference.

There can be little ground to question the necessity, and consequently the justice, of force to be, in some cases, interposed between individual and individual. Violence is so prompt a mode of deciding differences of opinion and contentions of passion, that there will infallibly be some persons who will resort to this mode. How is their violence to be repressed, or prevented from being accompanied occasionally with the most tragical effects? Violence must necessarily be preceded by an opinion of the mind dictating that violence; and, as he who first has resort to force instead of argument, is unquestionably erroneous, the best and most desirable mode of correcting him, is by convincing him of his error. But the urgency of the case, when, for example,



example, a dagger is pointed to my own breast or that of another, may be such as not to afford time for expostulation. Hence the propriety and duty of defence.

BOOK III.  
CHAP. I.

Is not defence equally necessary, on the part of a community, against a foreign enemy, or the contumacy of its own members? This is perhaps the most forcible view, in which the argument in favour of the institution of government has yet been placed. But, waving this question for the present, the enquiry now proposed is, if action on the part of the community should in any instance be found requisite, in what manner is it proper or just that the force, acting in behalf of the community, should be organised?

There are three hypotheses that have been principally maintained upon this subject. First, the system of force, according to which it is affirmed, "that, inasmuch as it is necessary that the great mass of mankind should be held under the subjection of compulsory restraint, there can be no other criterion of that restraint, than the power of the individuals who lay claim to its exercise, the foundation of which power exists, in the unequal degrees in which corporal strength, and intellectual sagacity, are distributed among mankind."

First hypothesis: government founded in superior strength.

There is a second class of reasoners, who deduce the origin of all government from divine right, and affirm, "that, as men derived their existence from an infinite creator at first, so are they still subject to his

Second hypothesis: government *jure divino*.



BOOK III.  
CHAP. I.Third hypo-  
thesis: the  
social con-  
tract.The first  
hypothesis  
examined.

The second.

Criterion of  
divine right:1. patriar-  
chal de-  
scend:

2. justice.

his providential care, and of consequence owe alle-  
giance to their civil governors, as to a power which  
he has thought fit to set over them."

The third system is that which has been most  
usually maintained by the friends of equality and  
justice; the system, according to which the indivi-  
duals of any society, are supposed to have entered  
into a contract with their governors or with each  
other, and which founds the authority of govern-  
ment in the consent of the governed.

The two first of these hypotheses may easily be  
dismissed. That of force appears to proceed upon  
the total negation of abstract and immutable jus-  
tice, affirming every government to be right, that  
is possessed of power sufficient to enforce its de-  
crees. It puts a violent termination upon all poli-  
tical science; and is calculated for nothing further,  
than to persuade men, to sit down quietly under  
their present disadvantages, whatever they may be,  
and not exert themselves to discover a remedy for  
the evils they suffer. The second hypothesis is of  
an equivocal nature. It either coincides with the  
first, and affirms all existing power to be alike of  
divine derivation; or it must remain totally useless,  
till a criterion can be found, to distinguish those  
governments which are approved by God, from  
those which cannot lay claim to that sanction. The  
criterion of patriarchal descent will be of no avail,  
till the true claimant and rightful heir can be dis-  
covered. If we make utility and justice the test of

God's



God's approbation, this hypothesis will be liable to little objection ; but then on the other hand little will be gained by it, since those who have not introduced divine right into the argument, will yet readily grant, that a government which can be shown to be agreeable to utility and justice, is a rightful government.

BOOK III.  
CHAP. I.

The third hypothesis demands a more careful examination. If any error have insinuated itself into the support of truth, it becomes of particular consequence to detect it. Nothing can be of more importance, than to separate prejudice and mistake on the one hand, from reason and demonstration on the other. Wherever they have been confounded, the cause of truth must necessarily be the sufferer. That cause, so far from being injured by a dissolution of the unnatural alliance, may be expected to derive from that dissolution a superior degree of prosperity and lustre.



## CHAP. II.

## OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT.

*Queries proposed.—Who are the contracting parties? —What is the form of engagement?—Over how long a period does the contract extend?—To how great a variety of propositions?—Can it extend to laws hereafter to be made?—Addresses of adhesion considered.—Power of a majority.*

BOOK III.  
CHAP. II.

*Queries proposed.*

UPON the first statement of the system of a social contract various difficulties present themselves. Who are the parties to this contract? For whom did they consent, for themselves only or for others? For how long a time is this contract to be considered as binding? If the consent of every individual be necessary, in what manner is that consent to be given? Is it to be tacit, or declared in express terms?

*Who are the contracting parties?*

Little will be gained for the cause of equality and justice, if our ancestors, at the first institution of government, had a right indeed of choosing the system of regulations under which they thought proper to live, but at the same time could barter away the understandings and independence of all that came after them, to the latest posterity. But, if the contract must be renewed in each successive generation,



generation, what periods must be fixed on for that purpose? And if I be obliged to submit to the established government till my turn comes to assent to it, upon what principle is that obligation founded? Surely not upon the contract into which my father entered before I was born?

Secondly, what is the nature of the consent, in consequence of which I am to be reckoned a party to the frame of any political constitution? It is usually said, "that acquiescence is sufficient; and that this acquiescence is to be inferred from my living quietly under the protection of the laws." But if this be true, an end is as effectually put to all political science; all discrimination of better and worse, as by any system invented by the most slavish sycophant. Upon this hypothesis every government that is quietly submitted to, is a lawful government, whether it be the usurpation of Cromwel, or the tyranny of Caligula. Acquiescence is frequently nothing more, than a choice on the part of the individual, of what he deems the least evil. In many cases it is not so much as this, since the peasant and the artisan, who form the bulk of a nation, however dissatisfied with the government of their country, seldom have it in their power to transport themselves to another. It is also to be observed upon the system of acquiescence, that it is in little agreement with the established opinions and practices of mankind. Thus what has been called the law of nations, lays least stress upon

What is the  
form of en-  
gagement?



BOOK III.  
CHAP. II.

upon the allegiance of a foreigner settling among us, though his acquiescence is certainly most complete; while natives removing into an uninhabited region are claimed by the mother country, and removing into a neighbouring territory are punished by municipal law, if they take arms against the country in which they were born. But surely acquiescence can scarcely be construed into consent, while the individuals concerned, are wholly unapprised of the authority intended to be rested upon it\*.

Locke, the great champion of the doctrine of an original contract, has been aware of this difficulty, and therefore observes, that “a tacit consent indeed obliges a man to obey the laws of any government, as long as he has any possessions, or enjoyment of any part of the dominions of that government; but nothing can make a man a member of the commonwealth, but his actually entering into it by positive engagement, and express promise and compact†.” A singular distinction! implying upon the face of it, that an acquiescence, such as has just been described, is sufficient to render a man amenable to the penal regulations of society; but that his own consent is necessary to entitle him to the privileges of a citizen.

Over how  
long a period  
does the con-  
tract extend?

A third objection to the social contract will suggest itself, as soon as we attempt to ascertain the

\* Hume's Essays, Part II, Essay xii.

† Treatise of Government, Book II, Chap. viii. § 119, 122.



extent of the obligation, even supposing it to have been entered into in the most solemn manner by every member of the community. Allowing that I am called upon, at the period of my coming of age for example, to declare my assent or dissent to any system of opinions or any code of practical institutes; for how long a period does this declaration bind me? Am I precluded from better information for the whole course of my life? And, if not for my whole life, why for a year, a week or even an hour? If my deliberate judgment, or my real sentiment, be of no avail in the case, in what sense can it be affirmed that all lawful government is founded in consent?

But the question of time is not the only difficulty. If you demand my assent to any proposition, it is necessary that the proposition should be stated simply and clearly. So numerous are the varieties of human understanding, in all cases where its independence and integrity are sufficiently preserved, that there is little chance of any two men coming to a precise agreement, about ten successive propositions that are in their own nature open to debate. What then can be more absurd, than to present to me the laws of England in fifty volumes folio, and call upon me to give an honest and uninfluenced vote upon their contents?

But the social contract, considered as the foundation of civil government, requires of me more than this. I am not only obliged to consent to all  
the

To how great a variety of propositions?

Can it extend to laws hereafter to be made?



BOOK III.  
CHAP. II.

the laws that are actually upon record, but to all the laws that shall hereafter be made. It was under this view of the subject that Rousseau, in tracing the consequences of the social contract, was led to assert, that "the great body of the people, in whom the sovereign authority resides, can neither delegate nor resign it. The essence of that authority," he adds, "is the general will; and will cannot be represented. It must either be the same or another; there is no alternative. The deputies of the people cannot be its representatives; they are merely its attorneys. The laws which the community does not ratify in person, are no laws, are nullities\*."

Addresses of  
adhesion  
considered.

The difficulty here stated, has been endeavoured to be provided against by some late advocates for liberty, in the way of addresses of adhesion; addresses, originating in the various districts and departments of a nation, and without which no regulation of constitutional importance is to be deemed valid. But this is a very superficial remedy. The addressers of course have seldom any other alternative, than that above alluded to, of indiscriminate

\* "La souveraineté ne peut être représentée, par la même raison qu'elle ne peut être aliénée; elle consiste essentiellement dans la volonté générale, et la volonté ne se représente point: elle est la même, ou elle est autre; il n'y a point de milieu. Les députés du peuple ne sont donc point ses représentans, ils ne sont que ses commissaires; ils ne peuvent rien conclure définitivement. Toute loi que le peuple en personne n'a pas ratifiée, est nulle; ce n'est point une loi."

*Du Contrat Social, Liv. III. Chap. xv.*



admission or rejection. There is an infinite difference between the first deliberation, and the subsequent exercise of a negative. The former is a real power, the latter is seldom more than the shadow of a power. Not to add, that addresses are a most precarious and equivocal mode of collecting the sense of a nation. They are usually voted in a tumultuous and summary manner; they are carried along by the tide of party; and the signatures annexed to them are obtained by indirect and accidental methods, while multitudes of bystanders, unless upon some extraordinary occasion, remain ignorant of or indifferent to the transaction.

Lastly, if government be founded in the consent of the people, it can have no power over any individual by whom that consent is refused. If a tacit consent be not sufficient, still less can I be deemed to have consented to a measure upon which I put an express negative. This immediately follows from the observations of Rousseau. If the people, or the individuals of whom the people is constituted, cannot delegate their authority to a representative; neither can any individual delegate his authority to a majority, in an assembly of which he is himself a member. That must surely be a singular species of consent, the external indications of which are often to be found, in an unremitting opposition in the first instance, and compulsory subjection in the second.

Power of a  
majority.



## CHAP. III.

## OF PROMISES.

*Promises not the foundation of morality—are, absolutely considered, an evil—are of unfrequent necessity.—Imperfect promises unavoidable.—Perfect promises in some cases necessary.—Obligation of promises—of the same nature as the obligation not to invade another man's property—admits of gradations.—Recapitulation.—Application.*

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CHAP. III.

THE whole principle of an original contract, rests upon the obligation under which we are conceived to be placed, to observe our promises. The reasoning upon which it is founded, is, “that we have promised obedience to government, and therefore are bound to obey.” The doctrine of a social contract would never have been thought worth the formality of an argument, had it not been presumed to be one of our first and paramount obligations, to perform our engagements. It may be proper therefore to enquire into the nature of this obligation.

Promises not  
the founda-  
tion of mo-  
rality:

And here the first observation that offers itself, upon the principle of the doctrines already delivered \*, is, that promises and compacts are in no sense the foundation of morality.

\* Book II, Ch. II, &c.

The



The foundation of morality is justice. The principle of virtue is an irresistible deduction from the wants of one man, and the ability of another to relieve them. It is not because I have promised, that I am bound to do that for my neighbour, which will be beneficial to him, and not injurious to me. This is an obligation which arises out of no compact, direct or understood; and would still remain, though it were impossible that I should experience a return, either from him or any other human being. It is not on account of any promise or previous engagement, that I am bound to tell my neighbour the truth. Undoubtedly one of the reasons why I should do so, is, because the obvious use of the faculty of speech is to inform, and not to mislead. But it is an absurd account of this motive, to say, that my having recourse to the faculty of speech, amounts to a tacit engagement that I will use it for its genuine purposes. The true ground of confidence between man and man, is the knowledge we have of the motives by which the human mind is influenced; our perception, that the motives to deceive can but rarely occur, while the motives to veracity will govern the stream of human actions.

This position will be made still more incontrovertible, if we bestow a moment's attention upon the question, Why should we observe our promises? The only rational answer that can be made is, because it tends to the welfare of intelligent beings.



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But this answer is equally cogent, if applied to any other branch of morality. It is therefore absurd to rest the foundation of morality thus circuitously upon promises, when it may with equal propriety be rested upon that from which promises themselves derive their obligation \*.

Again ; when I enter into an engagement, I engage for that which is in its own nature conducive to human happiness, or which is not so. Can my engagement always render that which before was injurious agreeable to, and that which was beneficial the opposite of duty ? Previously to my entering into a promise, there is something which I ought to promise, and something which I ought not. Previously to my entering into a promise, all modes of action were not indifferent. Nay, the very opposite of this is true. Every conceivable mode of action, has its appropriate tendency, and shade of tendency, to benefit, or to mischief, and consequently its appropriate claim to be performed or avoided. Thus clearly does it appear that promises and compacts are not the foundation of morality.

are, absolutely considered, an evil :

Secondly, I observe, that promises are, absolutely considered, an evil, and stand in opposition to the genuine and wholesome exercise of an intellectual nature.

Justice has already appeared to be the sum of moral and political duty. But the measure of justice, is the useful or injurious characters of the men

\* Hume's Essays, Part II, Essay xii.

with



with whom I am concerned ; the criterion of justice, is the influence my conduct will have upon the stock of general good. Hence it inevitably follows, that the motives by which duty requires me to govern my actions, must be such as are of general application.

What is it then to which the obligation of a promise applies ? What I have promised, is what I ought to have performed, if no promise had intervened, or it is not. It is conducive, or not conducive, to the generating of human happiness. If it be the former, then promise comes in merely as an additional inducement, in favour of that which, in the eye of morality, was already of indispensable obligation. It teaches me to do something from a precarious and temporary motive, which ought to be done for its intrinsic recommendations. If therefore right motives and a pure intention are constituent parts of virtue, promises are clearly at variance with virtue.

But promises will not always come in reinforcement of that which was duty before the promise was made. When it is otherwise, there is obviously a contention, between what would have been obligatory, if no promise had intervened, and what the promise which has been given, has a tendency to render obligatory.

Nor can it with much cogency be alleged in this argument, that promises may at least assume an empire over things indifferent. There is nothing



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which is truly indifferent. All things in the universe are connected together\*. It is true, that many of these links in human affairs, are too subtle to be traced by our grosser optics. But we should observe as many of them as we are able. He that is easily satisfied as to the morality of his conduct, will suppose that questions of duty are of rare occurrence, and perhaps lament that there is so little within his sphere to perform. But he that is anxiously alive to the inspirations of virtue, will scarcely find an hour in which he cannot, by act or preparation, contribute to the general weal. If then every shilling of our property, and every faculty of our mind, have received their destination from the principles of unalterable justice, promises have scarcely an atom of ground upon which they can properly and legitimately be called to decide.

There is another consideration of great weight in this case. Our faculties and our possessions are the means by which we are enabled to benefit others. Our time is the theatre in which only these means can unfold themselves. There is nothing the right disposal of which is more sacred. In order to the employing our faculties and our possessions in the way most conducive to the general good, we are bound to acquire all the information which our opportunities enable us to acquire. Now one of the principal means of information, is

\* Book II, Chap. V, p. 159.

time.



time. We must therefore devote to that object all the time our situation will allow. But we abridge, and that in the most essential point, the time of gaining information, if we bind ourselves to-day, to the conduct we will observe two months hence. He who thus anticipates upon the stores of knowledge, is certainly not less improvident, than he who lives by anticipating the stores of fortune.

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An active and conscientious man will continually add to his materials of judgment. Nor is it enough to say, that every man ought to regard his judgment as immature, and look forward with impatience to the moment which shall detect his present oversights. Beside this, it will always happen, that, however mature the faculties of any individual may deserve to be considered, he will be perpetually acquiring new information as to that respecting which his conduct is to be decided at some future period. Let the case be of an indentured servant. Why should I, unless there be something in the circumstances obliging me to submit to this disadvantage, engage to allow him to reside for a term of years under my roof, and to employ towards him a uniform mode of treatment, whatever his character may prove in the sequel? Why should he engage to live with and serve me, however tyrannical, cruel or absurd may be my carriage towards him? We shall both of us hereafter know more of each other, and of the benefits or inconveniences



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attendant on our connection. Why preclude ourselves from the use of this knowledge? Such a situation will inevitably generate a perpetual struggle, between the independent dictates of reason, and the conduct which the particular compact into which we have entered, may be supposed to prescribe.

It follows from what has been here adduced, that promises, in the same sense as has already been observed of government, are an evil, though, it may be, in some cases a necessary evil.—To remove the obscurity which might otherwise accompany this mode of expression, it is perhaps proper to advert to the sense in which the word evil is here used.

Evil may be either general or individual: an event may either be productive of evil in its direct and immediate operation, or in a just balance and comprehensive estimate of all the effects with which it is pregnant. In whichever of these senses the word is understood, the evil is not imaginary, but real.

Evil is a term, which differs from pain, only as it has a more comprehensive meaning. It may be defined to signify, whatever is painful itself, or is connected with pain, as an antecedent is connected with its consequent. Thus explained, it appears that a thing not immediately painful may be evil, but in a somewhat improper and imperfect sense. It bears the name of evil not upon its own account. Nothing is evil in the fullest sense but pain.

To



To this it may be added that pain is always an evil. Pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, constitute the whole ultimate subject of moral enquiry. There is nothing desirable, but the obtaining of the one, and the avoiding of the other. All the researches of human imagination cannot add a single article to this summary of good. Hence it follows that, wherever pain exists, there is evil. Were it otherwise, there would be no such thing as evil. If pain in one individual be not an evil, then it would not be an evil for pain to be felt by every individual that exists, and for ever. The universe is no more than a collection of individuals.

To illustrate this by an obvious example. The amputation of a leg is an evil of considerable magnitude. The pain attendant on the operation is exquisite. The cure is slow and tormenting. When cured, the man who has suffered the amputation, is precluded for ever, from a variety, both of agreeable amusements, and useful occupations. Suppose him to suffer this operation from pure wantonness, and we shall then see its calamity in the most striking light. Suppose, on the other hand, the operation to be the only alternative for stopping a mortification, and it becomes relatively good. But it does not, upon this account, cease to be an absolute evil. The painful sensation, at least to a considerable degree, remains; and the abridgment of his pleasures and utility for the rest of his life, is in no respect altered.

The



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CHAP. III.

The case of promises is considerably similar to this. So far as they have any effect, they depose us, as to the particular to which they relate, from the use of our own understanding; they call off our attention from the direct tendencies of our conduct, and fix it upon a merely local and precarious consideration. There may be cases in which they are necessary and ought to be employed: but we should never suffer ourselves, by their temporary utility to be induced to forget their intrinsic nature, and the demerits which adhere to them independently of any peculiar concurrence of circumstances.

are of un-  
frequent ne-  
cessity.

Thirdly, it may be added to the preceding observations, that promises are by no means of so frequent necessity as has been often imagined.

It may be asked, "How, without the intervention of promises, can the affairs of the world be carried on?" To this it will be a sufficient answer in the majority of instances, to say, that they will be best carried on by rational and intelligent beings acting as if they were rational and intelligent. Why should it be supposed that affairs would not for the most part go on sufficiently well, though my neighbour could no further depend upon my assistance, than it appeared reasonable to grant it? This will, upon many occasions, be a sufficient dependence, if I be honest; nor will he, if he be honest, desire any thing further.

But it will be alleged, "Human pursuits are often of a continued tenour, made up of a series of ac-  
tions,



tions, each of which is adopted, not for its own sake, but for the sake of some conclusion in which it terminates. Many of these depend for their success upon co-operation and concert. It is therefore necessary that I should have some clear and specific reason to depend upon the fidelity of my coadjutor, that so I may not be in danger, when I have for a length of time persisted in my exertions, of being frustrated by some change that his sentiments have undergone in the interval." To this it may be replied, that such a pledge of fidelity is less frequently necessary than is ordinarily imagined. Were it to be superseded in a variety of cases, men would be taught to have more regard to their own exertions, and less to the assistance of others, which caprice may refuse, or justice oblige them to withhold. They would acquire such merit, as should oblige every honest man, if needful, to hasten to their succour; and engage in such pursuits, as, not depending upon the momentary caprice of individuals, rested for their success upon the less precarious nature of general circumstances.

Having specified the various limitations that exist as to the utility of promises, it remains for us to discuss their form and obligation in the cases where they may be conceived to be necessary.

Promises are of two kinds, perfect and imperfect. A perfect promise is where the declaration of intention is made by me, for the express purpose of serving as a ground of expectation to my neighbour.



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CHAP. III.

bour respecting my future conduct. An imperfect promise is where it actually thus serves as a ground of expectation, though that was not my purpose when I made the declaration. Imperfect promises are of two classes: I may have reason, or I may have no reason, to know, when I make the declaration, that it will be acted upon by my neighbour, though not assuming the specific form of an engagement.

Imperfect  
promises  
unavoida-  
ble.

As to imperfect promises it may be observed, that they are wholly unavoidable. No man can always refrain from declaring his intention as to his future conduct. Nay, it should seem that, in many cases, if a man enquire of me the state of my mind in this respect, duty obliges me to inform him of this as I would of any other fact. Were it otherwise, a perpetual coldness and reserve would pervade all human intercourse. But the improvement of mankind rests upon nothing so essentially, as upon the habitual practice of candour, frankness and sincerity.

Perfect pro-  
mises in  
some cases  
necessary.

Perfect promises will also in various instances occur. I have occasion for an interview with a particular person tomorrow. I inform him of my intention of being upon a certain spot at a given hour of the day. It is convenient to him to go to the same place at the same time, for the purpose of meeting me. In this case, it is impossible to prevent the mutual declaration of intention, from serving as a sort of pledge of the performance. Qua-  
lifying



lifying expressions will make little alteration: the ordinary circumstances which qualify engagements, will in most cases be understood, whether they are stated or no. Appointments of this sort, so far from deserving to be uniformly avoided, ought in many cases to be sought, that there may be as little waste of time or exertion on either side, as the nature of the situation will admit.

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To proceed from the manner in which engagements are made, to the obligation that results from them. This obligation is of different degrees according to the nature of the case; but it is impossible to deny that it may be of the most serious import. We have already seen that each man is entitled to his sphere of discretion, which another may not, unless under the most imperious circumstances, infringe\*. But I infringe it as substantially, by leading him into a certain species of conduct through the means of delusive expectations, as by any system of usurpation it is possible to employ. A person promises me, I will suppose, five hundred pounds for a certain commodity, a book it may be, which I am to manufacture. I am obliged to spend several months in the production. Surely, after this, he can rarely be justified in disappointing me, and saying, I have found a better object upon which to employ my money. The case is nearly similar to that of the labourer who, after having performed his day's work, should be refused his wages. Take

Obligation  
of promises?

\* Book II, Chap. V.



BOOK III.  
CHAP. III.

of the same  
nature as  
the obliga-  
tion not to  
invade ano-  
ther man's  
property:

the case the other way, and suppose that, I having contracted to produce the commodity, the other party to the contract has advanced me three out of the five hundred pounds. Suppose further, that I am unable to replace this sum. Surely I am not at liberty to dispense myself from the performance of my engagement.

The case here is of the same nature as of any other species of property. Property is sacred: there is but one way in which duty requires the possessor to dispose of it, but I may not forcibly interfere, and dispose of it in the best way in his stead. This is the ordinary law of property, as derived from the principles of universal morality\*. But there are cases that supersede this law. The principle that attributes to every man the disposal of his property, as well as that distributes to every man his sphere of discretion, derives its force in both instances, from the consideration, that a greater sum of happiness will result from its observance than its infringement. Wherever therefore the contrary to this is clearly the case, there the force of the principle is suspended. What shall prevent me from taking by force from my neighbour's store, if the alternative be that I must otherwise perish with hunger? What shall prevent me from supplying the distress of my neighbour, from property that, strictly speaking, is not my own, if the emergence be terrible, and will not admit of delay?

\* Book VIII.

Nothing;



Nothing; unless it be the punishment that is reserved for such conduct in some instances; since it is no more fitting that I should bring upon myself calamity and death, than that I should suffer them to fall upon another.

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CHAP. III.

The vesting of property in any individual admits of different degrees of fulness, and, in proportion to that fulness, will be the mischief resulting from its violation. If then it appear that, even when the vesting amounts to the fulness of regular possession, there are cases in which it ought to be violated, the different degrees that fall short of this, will admit of still greater modification. It is in vain that the whole multitude of moralists assures us, that the sum I owe to another man, is as little to be infringed upon, as the wealth of which he is in possession. Every one feels the fallacy of this maxim. The sum I owe to another, may in many cases be paid, at my pleasure, either to-day or to-morrow, either this week or next. The means of payment, particularly with a man of slender resources, must necessarily be fluctuating, and he must employ his discretion, as to the proportion between his necessary and his gratuitous disbursements. When he ultimately fails of payment, the mischief he produces is real, but is not so great, at least in ordinary cases, as that which attends upon robbery. In fine, it is a law resulting from the necessity of nature, that he who has any species of property in trust, for however short a time, must have

admits of  
gradations.



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CHAP. III.

have a discretion, sometimes less and sometimes greater, as to the disposal of it.

To return once more to the main principle in this gradation. The property, most completely sanctioned by all the general rules that can be devised, is yet not inviolable. The imperious principle of self-preservation may authorise me to violate it. A great and eminent balance of good to the public may authorise its violation; and upon this ground we see proprietors occasionally compelled to part with their possessions, under every mode of government in the world. As a general maxim it may be admitted, that force is a legitimate means of prevention, where the alternative is complete, and the employment of force will not produce a greater evil, or subvert the general tranquillity. But, if direct force be in certain cases justifiable, indirect force, or the employment of the means placed in my hands without an anxious enquiry respecting the subordinate regulations of property, where the benefit to be produced is clear, is still more justifiable. Upon this ground, it may be my duty to relieve, upon some occasions, the wretchedness of my neighbour, without having first balanced the debtor and creditor side of my accounts, or when I know that balance to be against me. Upon this ground, every promise is considered as given under a reserve for unforeseen and imperious circumstances, whether that reserve be specifically stated or no. Upon the same ground an



appointment for an interview is considered as subject to a similar reserve; though the time of my neighbour, which I dissipate upon that supposition, is as real a property as his wealth, is a part of that sphere over which every man is entitled to the exercise of his separate discretion. It is impossible that human society can subsist, without frequent incroachments of one man upon his neighbour: we sufficiently discharge our duty, if we habitually recollect that each man has his province, and endeavour to regulate our conduct accordingly.

These principles are calculated to set in a clearer light than they have often been exhibited, the cases that authorise the violation of promises. Compact is not the foundation of morality; on the contrary, it is an expedient to which we are sometimes obliged to have resort, but the introduction of which must always be regarded by an enlightened observer with jealousy. It ought never to be called forth but in cases of the clearest necessity. It is not the principle upon which our common happiness reposes; it is only one of the means for securing that happiness. The adherence to promises therefore, as well as their employment in the first instance, must be decided by the general criterion, and maintained only so far as, upon a comprehensive view, it shall be found productive of a balance of happiness.

Recapitulation.

There is further an important distinction to be made, between a promise given without an inten-



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tion to perform it, and a promise which information; afterwards acquired, persuades me to violate. The first can scarcely in any instance take place, without fixing a stain upon the promiser, and exhibiting him, to say the least, as a man greatly deficient in delicacy of moral discrimination. The case of the second is incomparably different. Every engagement into which I have entered, an adherence to which I shall afterwards find to be a material obstacle to my utility (suppose an engagement not to write any thing in derogation of the thirty-nine articles), ought to be violated: nor can there be any limitation upon this maxim, except where the violation will greatly incroach upon the province and jurisdiction of my neighbour.

Application.

Let us apply these remarks upon the nature of promises, to the doctrine of a social contract. It is not through the medium of any supposed promise or engagement, that we are induced to believe, that the conduct of our neighbour will not be ridiculously inconsistent or wantonly malicious. If he protest in the most solemn way against being concluded by any such promise, at the same time that he conducts himself in a rational and sober manner, he will not find us less disposed to confide in him. We depend as readily upon a foreigner, that he will not break the laws, and expose himself to their penalties (for this has been supposed to be one of the principal branches of the social contract), as we do upon our countryman. If we do not de-  
pend



pend equally upon the Arabs who inhabit the plains of Asia, it is not because we impute to them a deficiency in their social contract, but because we are ignorant of their principles of conduct, or know that those principles do not afford us a sufficient security, as to the particulars of our intercourse with them. Tell a man what will be the solid and substantial effects of his proceeding, how it will affect his neighbours, and what influence it will have upon his own happiness, and you speak to the unalienable feelings of the human mind. But tell him that, putting these things for the present out of our consideration, it is sufficient that he has promised a certain conduct, or that, if he have not expressly promised it, he has promised it by implication, or that, if he have not promised it, his ancestors a few generations back promised it for him; and you speak of a motive that scarcely finds a sympathetic chord in one human breast, and that few will so much as understand.

Few things can be more absurd than to talk of our having promised obedience to the laws. If the laws depend upon promises for their execution, why are they accompanied with sanctions? Why is it considered as the great arcanum of legislation, to make laws that are easy of execution, and that need no assistance from the execrable intervention of oaths and informers? Again, why should I promise, that I will do every thing that a certain power, called the government, shall imagine it convenient,



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CHAP. III.

or decide that it is fitting, for me to do? Is there in this, either morality, or justice, or common sense? Does brute force alone communicate to its possessor a sufficient claim upon my veneration? For, be it observed, the wisdom or duty of obedience proceeds upon exactly the same principle, whether it be to a tyrant, or to the most regularly elected house of representatives. There is but one power to which I can yield a heart-felt obedience, the decision of my own understanding, the dictate of my own conscience. The decrees of any other power, especially if I have a firm and independent mind, I shall obey with reluctance and aversion. My obedience is purely an affair of composition: I choose to do that which, in itself considered, my judgment disapproves, rather than incur the greater evil, which the power from whom the mandate issues, annexes to my disobedience\*.

There is another principle concerned in this subject, and that is sincerity: I may not evade the laws of the society by any dishonourable subterfuge or contemptible duplicity. But the obligation of sincerity, like all the other great principles of morality, is not founded in promises, but in the infeasible benefit annexed to its observance. Add to which, the sincerity I am bound to practise towards the magistrate, particularly in a case where his requisition shall be unjust, is not different in its principle, and is certainly of no higher obligation,

\* Chap. VI.



than the sincerity I am bound to practise towards a private individual.

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Let us however suppose that the assertion of an implied contract in every community is true, or let us take the case where an actual engagement has been entered into by the members of the society. This appears from what has been already delivered, to be of that class of promises which are of slightest obligation. In the notion of a social contract little is made over, little expectation is excited, and therefore little mischief is included in its breach. What we most expect and require in a member of the same community, is the qualities of a man, and the conduct that ought to be observed indifferently by a native or a stranger. Where a promise or an oath is imposed upon me superfluously, as is always the case with promises of allegiance; or where I am compelled to make it by the operation of a penalty; the treatment I suffer is atrociously unjust, and of consequence the breach of such a promise is peculiarly susceptible of apology. A promise of allegiance is a declaration that I approve the actual constitution of things, and, so far as it is binding, an engagement that I will continue to support that constitution. But I shall support it, for as long a time, and in as great a degree, as I approve of it, without needing the intervention of a promise. It will be my duty not to undertake its destruction by precipitate and unpromising means, for a much more cogent reason than can be deduced from any pro-



BOOK III.  
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mise I have made. An engagement for any thing further than this, is both immoral and absurd: it is an engagement to a non-entity, a constitution; a promise that I will abstain from doing that which I believe to be beneficial to my fellow citizens.

## C H A P. IV.

## OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY.

*Common deliberation the true foundation of government—proved from the equal claims of mankind—from the nature of our faculties—from the object of government—from the effects of common deliberation.—Delegation vindicated.—Difference between the doctrine here maintained and that of a social contract.—Remark.*

## CHAP. IV.

HAVING rejected the hypotheses that have most generally been advanced as to the rational basis of a political authority, let us enquire whether we may not arrive at the same object, by a simple investigation of the obvious reason of the case, without refinement of system or fiction of process.

Common  
deliberation  
the true  
foundation  
of govern-  
ment:

Government then being first supposed necessary for the welfare of mankind, the most important principle that can be imagined relative to its structure, seems to be this; that, as government is a transaction



transaction in the name and for the benefit of the whole, every member of the community ought to have some share in the selection of its measures. The arguments in support of this proposition are various.

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CHAP. IV.

First, it has already appeared that there is no satisfactory criterion, marking out any man, or set of men, to preside over the rest.

proved from  
the equal  
claims of  
mankind :

Secondly, all men are partakers of the common faculty, reason ; and may be supposed to have some communication with the common instructor, truth. It would be wrong in an affair of such momentous concern, that any chance for additional wisdom should be rejected ; nor can we tell, in many cases, till after the experiment, how eminent any individual may be found, in the business of guiding and deliberating for his fellows.

from the  
nature of  
our facul-  
ties :

Thirdly, government is a contrivance instituted for the security of individuals ; and it seems both reasonable, that each man should have a share in providing for his own security ; and probable, that partiality and cabal will by this means be most effectually excluded.

from the  
object of go-  
vernment :

Lastly, to give each man a voice in the public concerns comes nearest to that fundamental purpose of which we should never lose sight, the uncontrolled exercise of private judgment. Each man will thus be inspired with a consciousness of his own importance, and the slavish feelings that shrink up

from the ef-  
fects of com-  
mon delibe-  
ration.



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CHAP. IV.

the soul in the presence of an imagined superior, will be unknown.

Admitting then the propriety of each man having a share in directing the affairs of the whole in the first instance, it seems necessary that he should concur in electing a house of representatives, if he be the member of a large state; or, even in a small one, that he should assist in the appointment of officers and administrators\*; which implies, first, a delegation of authority to these officers, and, secondly, a tacit consent, or rather an admission of the necessity, that the questions to be debated should abide the decision of a majority.

Delegation  
vindicated.

But to this system of delegation the same objections may be urged, that were cited from Rousseau under the head of a social contract. It may be alleged that, "if it be the business of every man to exercise his own judgment, he can in no instance surrender this function into the hands of another."

To this objection it may be answered, first, that the parallel is by no means complete, between an individual's exercise of his judgment in a case that is truly his own, and his exercise of his judgment in an article where the province of a government is already admitted. If there be something contrary to the simplest ideas of justice in such a delegation,

\* We shall be led, in a subsequent branch of this enquiry, to investigate how far either of these measures is inseparable from the maintenance of social order. Book V, Chap. XXIV.

this



this is an evil inseparable from political government. The true and only adequate apology of government is necessity; the office of common deliberation is solely, to supply the most eligible means of meeting that necessity.

Secondly, the delegation we are here considering, is not, as the word in its most obvious sense may seem to imply, the act of one man committing to another, a function which, strictly speaking, it became him to exercise for himself. Delegation, in every instance in which it can be reconciled with justice, proposes for its object the general good. The individuals to whom the delegation is made, are either more likely, from talents or leisure, to perform the function in the most eligible manner, or there is at least some public interest requiring that it should be performed by one or a few persons, rather than by every individual for himself. This is the case, whether in that first and simplest of all political delegations, the prerogative of a majority, or in the election of a house of representatives, or in the appointment of public officers. Now all contest, as to the person who shall exercise a certain function and the propriety of resigning it, is frivolous, the moment it is decided how and by whom it can most advantageously be exercised. It is of no consequence that I am the parent of a child, when it has once been ascertained that the child will live with greater benefit under the superintendence of a stranger.

Lastly,



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CHAP. IV.

Lastly, it is a mistake to imagine that the propriety of restraining me, when my conduct is injurious, rises out of any delegation of mine. The justice of employing force upon certain emergencies, was at least equally cogent before the existence of society \*. Force ought never to be resorted to but in cases of absolute necessity; and, when such cases occur, it is the duty of every man to defend himself from violation. There is therefore no delegation necessary on the part of the offender; but the community, in the censure it exercises over him, puts itself in the place of the injured party.

From what is here stated, we may be enabled to form the clearest and most unexceptionable idea of the nature of government. Every man, as was formerly observed†, has a sphere of discretion; that sphere is limited by the co-ordinate sphere of his neighbour. The maintenance of this limitation, the office of taking care that no man exceeds his sphere, is the first business of government. Its powers, in this respect, are a combination of the powers of individuals to control the excesses of each other. Hence is derived to the individuals of the community, a second and indirect province, of providing, by themselves or their representatives, that this control is not exercised in a despotical manner, or carried to an undue excess.

Difference  
between the

It may perhaps be imagined by some persons,

\* Chap. I, p. 184.

† Book II, Chap. V.

that



that the doctrine here delivered, of the justice of proceeding in common concerns by a common deliberation, is nearly coincident with that which affirms a lawful government to derive its authority from a social contract. Let us consider what is the true difference between them: and this seems principally to lie in the following particular.

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CHAP. IV.

doctrine  
here main-  
tained and  
that of a so-  
cial con-  
tract.

The principle of a social contract, is an engagement, to which a man is bound by honour, fidelity or consistency to adhere. According to the principle here laid down, he is bound to nothing. He joins in the common deliberation, because he foresees that some authority will be exercised, and because this is the best chance that offers itself, for approximating the exercise of that authority, to the dictates of his own understanding. But, when the deliberation is over, he finds himself as much disengaged as ever. If he conform to the mandate of authority, it is either because he individually approves it, or from a principle of prudence, because he foresees that a greater mass of evil will result from his disobedience, than of good. He obeys the freest and best constituted authority, upon the same principle that would lead him, in most instances, to yield obedience to a despotism; only with this difference, that, if the act of authority be erroneous, he finds it less probable that it will be corrected in the first instance, than in the second, since it proceeds from the erroneous judgment of a whole people.—But all this will appear with



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with additional evidence, when we come to treat of the subject of obedience.

Remark.

Too much stress has undoubtedly been laid upon the idea, as of a grand and magnificent spectacle, of a nation deciding for itself upon some great public principle, and of the highest magistracy yielding its claims when the general voice has pronounced. The value of the whole must at last depend upon the quality of their decision. Truth cannot be made more true by the number of its votaries. Nor is the spectacle much less interesting, of a solitary individual, bearing his undaunted testimony in favour of justice, though opposed by misguided millions. Within certain limits however the beauty of the exhibition may be acknowledged. That a nation should exercise undiminished its function of common deliberation, is a step gained, and a step that inevitably leads to an improvement of the character of individuals. That men should agree in the assertion of truth, is no unpleasing evidence of their virtue. Lastly, that an individual, however great may be his imaginary elevation, should be obliged to yield his personal pretensions to the sense of the community, at least bears the appearance of a practical confirmation of the great principle, that all private considerations must yield to the general good.

CHAP.



OF LEGISLATION.

CHAP. V.

OF LEGISLATION.

*Society can declare and interpret, but cannot enact.—  
Its authority only executive.*

HAVING thus far investigated the nature of political functions, it seems necessary that some explanation should be given upon the subject of legislation. “Who is it that has authority to make laws? What are the characteristics of that man or body of men, in whom the tremendous faculty is vested, of prescribing to the rest of the community, what they are to perform, and what to avoid?”

The answer to these questions is exceedingly simple: Legislation, as it has been usually understood, is not an affair of human competence. Immutable reason is the true legislator, and her decrees it behoves us to investigate. The functions of society extend, not to the making, but the interpreting of law; it cannot decree, it can only declare that, which the nature of things has already decreed, and the propriety of which irresistibly flows from the circumstances of the case.

Montesquieu says that, “in a free state, every man

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Society can  
declare and  
interpret,  
but cannot  
enact.

Its authori-  
ty only exe-  
cutive.



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man will be his own legislator\*.” This is not true, in matters the most purely individual, unless in the limited sense already explained. It is the office of conscience to determine, “not like an Asiatic cadi, according to the ebbs and flows of his own passions, but like a British judge, who makes no new law, but faithfully declares that law which he finds already written†.” The same distinction is to be made upon the subject of political authority. All government is, strictly speaking, executive. It has appeared to be necessary, with respect to men as we at present find them, that force should sometimes be employed in repressing injustice; and for the same reasons, that this force should, as far as possible, be vested in the community. To the public support of justice therefore the authority of the community extends. But no sooner does it wander in the smallest degree from the line of justice, than its proper authority is at an end; it may be submitted to by its subjects from necessity; from necessity it may be exercised, as an individual complies with his ill-informed conscience in default of an enlightened one; but it ought never to be confounded with the lessons of real duty, or the decisions of impartial truth.

\* “*Dans un état libre, tout homme qui est censé avoir une ame libre, doit être gouverné par lui-même.*” *Esprit des Loix*, Liv. XI, Ch. vi.

† Sterne’s Sermons.—“Of a Good Conscience.”



## CHAP. VI.

## OF OBEDIENCE.

*Rational obedience not founded in contract.—Kinds of obedience.—Compulsory obedience often less injurious than confidence.—Kinds of authority.—Limitations of confidence.—Reverence to superiors considered.—Government founded in ignorance.*

THE two great questions upon which the theory of government depends, are: Upon what foundation can political authority with the greatest propriety rest? and, What are the considerations which bind us to political obedience? Having entered at length into the first of these questions, it is time that we should proceed to the examination of the second.

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One of the most popular theories, relative to the foundation of political authority, we have seen to be that of an original contract, affirming, that the criterion of political justice is to be found, in the conventions and rules which have been adjusted by the community at large. In pursuance of this original position, the same theorists have necessarily gone on and affirmed, that the true source of obligation to political obedience was to be found in the same principle, and that, in obeying a government regularly

Rational  
obedience  
not founded  
in contract.



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gularly constituted, we did nothing more than perform our engagements.

The reasonings in support of this hypothesis are obvious. "Suppose a number of persons living in any neighbourhood, should perceive that great common benefit would accrue from building a bridge, sinking a canal, or making a highway. The simplest mode for them to adopt, is, to consult together, and raise the money necessary for effecting this desirable purpose, by each man assessing himself according to his ability, and contributing his quota to a common fund. Now it is plain that, in this case, each pays his assessment (supposing the payment to be voluntary) in consideration of the previous agreement; his contribution would be of no avail, however desirable was the object to be effected, had he not reason to depend upon the rest of the neighbourhood, that they would pay theirs. But government," say the advocates of an original contract, "when regularly constituted, is precisely such a provision, as the one here stated for building a bridge, or making a road: it is a consultation and settlement among the different members of a community, as to the regulations most conducive to the benefit of the whole. It is upon this principle that taxes are paid, and that the force of the community is drawn out in such proportions, as are necessary to repress the external or internal disturbers of its tranquillity. The ground therefore upon which each man contributes his share of



of effort or property, is, that he may perform his contract, and discharge that for which he has engaged as a member of the community."

The refutation of this hypothesis has been anticipated in the preceding chapters.—Government can with no propriety be compared to the construction of a bridge or a canal, a matter of mere convenience and refinement. It is supposed to be of the most irresistible necessity; it is indisputably an affair of hardship and restraint. It constitutes other men the arbitrators of my actions, and the ultimate disposers of my destiny.—Almost every member of every community that has existed on the face of the earth, might reasonably say, "I know of no such contract as you describe; I never entered into any such engagement; I never promised to obey; it must therefore be an iniquitous imposition to call upon me to do something, under pretence of a promise I never made."—The reason a man lives under any particular government is partly necessity; he cannot easily avoid living under some government, and it is often scarcely in his power to abandon the country in which he was born: it is also partly a choice of evils; no man can be said, in this case, to enjoy that freedom which is essential to the forming a contract, unless it could be shown that he had a power of instituting, somewhere, a government adapted to his own conceptions.—Government in reality, as has abundantly appeared, is a question of force, and not of consent.



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sent. It is desirable, that a government should be made as agreeable as possible to the ideas and inclinations of its subjects; and that they should be consulted, as extensively as may be, respecting its construction and regulations. But, at last, the best constituted government that can be formed, particularly for a large community, will contain many provisions that, far from having obtained the consent of all its members, encounter even in their outset a strenuous, though ineffectual, opposition.—From the whole of these reasonings it appears, that, in those measures which have the concurrence of my judgment, I may reasonably be expected to cooperate with willingness and zeal; but, for the rest, my only justifiable ground of obedience is, that I will not disturb the repose of the community, or that I do not perceive the question to be of sufficient magnitude to authorise me in incurring the penalty.

To understand the subject of obedience with sufficient accuracy, it is necessary that we should attend to the various shades of meaning of which the word is susceptible.

Kinds of  
obedience.

Every voluntary action is an act of obedience; in performing it, we comply with some view, and are guided by some incitement or motive.

The purest kind of obedience is, where an action flows from the independent conviction of our private judgment, where we are directed, not by the precarious and mutable interference of another, but  
by



by a recollection of the intrinsic and indefeasible tendency of the action to be performed\*. In this case the object of obedience, is the dictate of the understanding: the action may, or may not, be such as my neighbours or the community will approve, but this approbation does not constitute its direct motive.

The kind of obedience, which stands next to this in its degree of voluntariness, arises in the following manner. Every man is capable of comparing himself with his fellow. Every man will find, that there are some points, in which he is the equal or perhaps the superior of other men, but that there are certainly some points, in which other men are superior to him. The superiority in question in the present instance, is superiority of intellect or information. It may happen, that the point in which another man surpasses me, is a point of some importance to my welfare or convenience. I want, for example, to build a house, or to sink a well. It may happen that I have not leisure or means to acquire the science necessary for this purpose. Upon that supposition I am not to be blamed, if I employ a builder for the first, or a mechanic for the second; nor shall I be liable to blame, if I work in person under his direction. This sort of obedience is distinguished by the appellation of confidence; and to justify, in a moral view, the reposing of confidence, the only thing necessary is, that it should be fitter

\* Book II, Chap. VI.



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and more beneficial, all things considered, that the function to be performed should be performed by another person, than that it should be performed by me.

The third and last kind of obedience necessary to be adverted to upon the present occasion, is, where I do that which is not prescribed to me by my private judgment, merely on account of the mischievous consequences that I foresee will be annexed to my omission, by the arbitrary interference of some voluntary being.

Compulsory  
obedience  
often less  
injurious  
than confi-  
dence.

The most important observation that arises upon the statement of this scale of obedience, is, that obedience in the second degree, ought to be guarded with as much jealousy, and kept by the person yielding obedience within as narrow limits, as possible. The last sort of obedience will frequently be necessary. Voluntary beings constitute a large portion of the universe; we shall often have occasion to foresee their arbitrary determinations and conduct, nor can knowledge, as such, in any instance fail to be a desirable acquisition; our conduct therefore must and ought to be modified by their interferences. Morality, as has already been frequently observed, consists entirely in an estimate of consequences; he is the truly virtuous man, who produces the greatest portion of benefit his situation will admit. The most exalted morality indeed, that in which the heart reposes with the most unmingled satisfaction, relates to the inherent and  
indefeasible



indefeasible tendencies of actions. But we shall be by no means excusable, if we overlook, in our system of conduct, the arbitrary awards of other men. Nothing can be more certain, than that an action, suppose of inferior moment or utility, which for its own sake might be right to be performed, it may become my duty to neglect, if I know that by performing it I shall incur the penalty of death.

The mischiefs attendant on the frequent recurrence of this species of obedience, and the grounds upon which its interference is to be guarded against, as extensively as circumstances will admit, have already been stated\*. Yet obedience flowing from the consideration of a penalty, is less a source of degradation and depravity, than a habit of obedience founded in confidence. The man who yields it, may reserve, in its most essential sense, his independence. He may be informed in judgment, and resolved in purpose, as to every moral and social obligation. He may suffer his understanding neither to be seduced nor confounded; he may observe, in its fullest extent, the mistake and prepossession of his neighbour, to which he thus finds it necessary to accommodate himself. It seems possible, that he who thus pities the folly, while he complies with the necessity, may still, even under this discipline, grow in discrimination and sagacity.

The greatest mischief that can arise in the progress of obedience, is, where it shall lead us, in any

\* Book II, Chap. VI.



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CHAP. VI.

degree, to depart from the independence of our understanding, a departure which general and unlimited confidence necessarily includes. In this view, the best advice that could be given to a person in a state of subjection, is, "Comply, where the necessity of the case demands it; but criticise while you comply. Obey the unjust mandates of your governors; for this prudence and a consideration of the common safety may require; but treat them with no false lenity, regard them with no indulgence. Obey; this may be right; but beware of reverence. Reverence nothing but wisdom and skill: government may be vested in the fittest persons; then they are entitled to reverence, because they are wise, and not because they are governors: and it may be vested in the worst. Obedience will occasionally be right in both cases: you may run south, to avoid a wild beast advancing in that direction, though you want to go north. But be upon your guard against confounding things, so totally unconnected with each other, as a purely political obedience, and respect. Government is nothing but regulated force; force is its appropriate claim upon your attention. It is the business of individuals to persuade; the tendency of concentrated strength, is only to give consistency and permanence to an influence more compendious than persuasion."

Kinds of  
authority.

All this will be made somewhat clearer, if we reflect on the proper correlative of obedience, authority:



thority: and here let us recur to the three sorts of obedience above specified.

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CHAP. VI.

The first kind of authority then, is the authority of reason, what is really such, or is only conceived to be such. The terms, both authority and obedience, are less frequently employed in this sense than in either of the following.

The second species of authority, is that which depends for its validity upon the confidence of him with whom it prevails, and is where, not having myself acquired such information as to enable me to form a judicious opinion, I yield a greater or less degree of deference to the known sentiment and decision of another. This seems to be the strictest and most precise meaning of the word authority; as obedience, in its most refined sense, denotes that compliance which is the offspring of respect.

Authority in the last of the three senses alluded to, is where a man, in issuing his precept, does not deliver that which may be neglected with impunity; but his requisition is attended with a sanction, and the violation of it will be followed with a penalty. This is the species of authority which properly connects itself with the idea of government. It is a violation of political justice, to confound the authority which depends upon force, with the authority which arises from reverence and esteem; the modification of my conduct which might be due in the case of a wild beast, with the modifica-



BOOK III.  
CHAP. VI.Limitations  
of confi-  
dence.

tion which is due to superior wisdom. These two kinds of authority may happen to vest in the same person; but they are altogether distinct and independent of each other.

The consequence which has flowed from confounding them, has been, a greater debasement of the human character, than could easily have followed upon direct and unqualified slavery. The principle of confidence, and the limitations with which it ought to be attended, are capable of an easy and convincing explication. I am bound, to the fullest extent that is consistent with my opportunities and situation, to exercise my understanding. Man is the ornament of the universe, only in proportion as he consults his judgment. Whatever I submit to from the irresistible impulse of necessity, is not mine, and debases me only as it tends gradually to shackle the intrepidity of my character. With respect to some men therefore it may be innoxious. But, where I make the voluntary surrender of my understanding, and commit my conscience to another man's keeping, the consequence is clear. I then become the most mischievous and pernicious of animals. I annihilate my individuality as a man, and dispose of my force as an animal to him among my neighbours, who shall happen to excel in imposture and artifice, and to be least under restraint from the scruples of integrity and justice. I put an end, as to my own share, to that happy collision of understandings,



standings, upon which the hopes of human improvement depend. I can have no genuine fortitude, for fortitude is the offspring of conviction. I can have no conscious integrity, for I do not understand my own principles, and have never brought them to the test of examination. I am the ready tool of injustice, cruelty and profligacy; and, if at any time I am not employed in their purposes, it is the result of accident, not of my own precaution and honesty.

The understanding must first be consulted, and then, no doubt, confidence will come in for its share of jurisdiction. The considerations, which will have influence in the mind of an impartial enquirer, to enforce, or to give an air of doubtfulness to, his opinions, are numerous. Among these, he will not refuse attention to the state of opinion in the present or any preceding generation of men. In the mean time it will rarely happen, that the authority of other men's judgment in cases of general enquiry, will be of great weight. Either men of equal talents and integrity have embraced both sides; or their prejudice, and deficiency as to the materials of judging, have been such, as extremely to weaken their testimony. Add to this, that the only ground of opinion, strictly so called, is the intrinsic evidence of the opinion itself; upon that our judgment must be formed; and the decision of others can have no effect, but that of increasing or diminishing our doubt of the rectitude



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CHAP. VI.

tude of our own perceptions. The direct province of confidence, is to supply, in the best way the case will admit, the defect of our knowledge; but it can never, strictly speaking, furnish knowledge itself. Its proper use belongs rather to the circumstance, of actions immediately to be determined on, than to matters of speculation and principle. Thus, I ought not perhaps to refuse weight to the advice of some men, even when the reasons by which they inforce their advice are conceived by me to be problematical: and thus, I am bound, as before stated, to trust another, in the moment of emergency, in the art he has studied, rather than myself by whom that study was never undertaken. Except when the nature of my situation calls upon me to act, I shall do more wisely in refraining from any decision, in questions where I am not assisted to decide by information that is properly my own.

Reverence  
to superiors  
considered.

One of the lessons most assiduously inculcated upon mankind in all ages and countries, is that of reverence to our superiors. If by this maxim be intended our superiors in wisdom, it may be admitted, but with some qualification. But, if it imply our superiors in station only, nothing can be more contrary to reason and justice. Is it not enough that they have usurped certain advantages over us to which they can show no equitable claim; and must we also humble our courage, and renounce our independence, in their presence? Why reverence a man because he happens to be born



born to certain privileges; or because a concurrence of circumstances (for wisdom, as we have already seen, gives a claim to respect utterly distinct from power) has procured him a share in the legislative or executive government of our country? Let him content himself with the obedience which is the result of force; for to that only is he entitled.

Reverence to our superiors in wisdom is to be admitted, but with considerable limitations. I am bound, as has already appeared, to repose certain functions, such as that of building my house, or educating my child, in the hands of him by whom those functions will most properly be discharged. It may be right, that I should act under the person to whom I have thus given my suffrage, in cases where I have reason to be persuaded of his skill, and cannot be expected to acquire the necessary skill myself. But in those cases of general justice which are equally within the province of every human understanding, I am a deserter from the requisitions of duty, if I do not assiduously exert my faculties, or if I be found to act contrary to the conclusions they would dictate, from deference to the opinions of another.—The reverence we are here considering is a reverence prompting us to some kind of obedience; there is another kind, terminating in esteem only, that, so far from deserving to be confined within these strict limitations, we are bound to extend to every man who is the possessor of estimable qualities.

The



BOOK III.  
CHAP. VI.

The reverence which is due from a child to his parent, or rather to his senior in age and experience, falls under the same rules as have already been delivered. Wherever I have good reason to believe, that another person knows better than myself what is proper to be done, there I ought to conform to his direction. But the advantage which he possesses, must be obvious, otherwise I shall not be justified in my proceeding. If I take into the account every chance for advantage, I shall never act upon the result of my own reflections. The mind of one man is essentially distinct from the mind of another. If each do not preserve his individuality, the judgment of all will be feeble, and the progress of our common understanding inexpressibly retarded. Hence it follows, that the deference of a child becomes vicious, whenever he has reason to doubt that the parent possesses essential information, of which he is deprived. Nothing can be more necessary for the general benefit, than that we should divest ourselves, as soon as the proper period arrives, of the shackles of infancy; that human life should not be one eternal childhood; but that men should judge for themselves, unfettered by the prejudices of education, or the institutions of their country.

To a government therefore, that talked to us of deference to political authority, and honour to be rendered to our superiors, our answer should be: “It is yours, to shackle the body, and restrain our external actions; that is a restraint we understand.

Announce



Announce your penalties ; and we will make our election of submission or suffering. But do not seek to enslave our minds. Exhibit your force in its plainest form, for that is your province ; but seek not to inveigle and mislead us. Obedience and external submission is all you are entitled to claim ; you can have no right to extort our deference, and command us not to see, and disapprove of, your errors.” In the mean time it should be observed, that it is by no means a necessary consequence, that we should disapprove of all the measures of government ; but there must be disapprobation, wherever there is a question of strict political obedience.

A corollary which flows from these principles is deserving of our attention. Confidence is in all cases the offspring of ignorance. It must therefore continually decline, in relation, as was above stated, to ‘ those cases of general justice which are equally within the province of every human understanding \*,’ in proportion as wisdom and virtue shall increase. But the questions that belong to the department of government, are questions of general justice. The conduct of an enlightened and virtuous man, can only be conformable to the regulations of government, so far as those regulations are accidentally coincident with his private judgment, or as he acts with prudent and judicious submission to the necessity of the case. He will

Govern-  
ment found-  
ed in igno-  
rance.

\* P. 235.



not act from confidence; for he has himself examined, as it was his duty to do, the merits of the action: and he has not failed to detect the imposture, that would persuade us there is a mystery in government, which uninitiated mortals must not presume to penetrate. Now it is sufficiently known that the empire of government is built in opinion\*; nor is it enough for this purpose, that we refuse to contribute to overturn it by violence, the opinion must go to the extent of prompting us to actual support. No government can subsist in a nation, the individuals of which shall merely abstain from tumultuous resistance, while in their genuine sentiments they censure and despise its institution. In other words, government cannot proceed but upon confidence, as confidence on the other hand cannot exist without ignorance. The true supporters of government are the weak and uninformed, and not the wise. In proportion as weakness and ignorance shall diminish, the basis of government will also decay. This however is an event which ought not to be contemplated with alarm. A catastrophe of this description, would be the true euthanasia of government. If the annihilation of blind confidence and implicit opinion can at any time be effected, there will necessarily succeed in their place, an unforced concurrence of all in promoting the general welfare. But, whatever may be the event in this

\* Book I, Chap. VI, p. 98; Book II, Chap. III, p. 144.



respect, and the future history of political societies\*, we shall do well to remember this characteristic of government, and apply it as the universal touchstone of the institution itself. As in the commencement of the present Book we found government indebted for its existence to the errors and perverseness of a few, so it now appears, that it can no otherwise be perpetuated, than by the infantine and uninstructed confidence of the many. It may be to a certain degree doubtful, whether the human species will ever be emancipated from their present subjection and pupillage, but let it not be forgotten that this is their condition. The recollection will be salutary to individuals, and may ultimately be productive of benefit to all.

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CHAP. VI.

## CH A P. VII.

## OF FORMS OF GOVERNMENT.

*Uniformity of the nature of man.—Different degrees in which he possesses information.—Imperfect schemes of society estimated.—Mode in which improvements are to be realised.—Inference.*

THERE is one other topic relative to general principles of government, which it seems fitting and useful to examine in this place. “Is

CHAP.  
VII.

\* Book V, Chap. XXII, XXIV.

there



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CHAP.  
VII.

there a scheme of political institution, which, as coming nearest to perfection, ought to be prescribed to all nations; or, on the other hand, are different forms of government best adapted to the condition of different nations, each worthy to be commended in its peculiar place, but none proper to be transplanted to another soil?"

The latter part of this alternative is the creed which has ordinarily prevailed; but it is attended with obvious objections.

Uniformity  
of the na-  
ture of man.

If one form of government makes one nation happy, why should it not equally contribute to the felicity of another?

The points in which human beings resemble, are infinitely more considerable than those in which they differ. We have the same senses; and the impressions on those senses which afflict me, may ordinarily be expected to be sources of anguish to you. It is true that men differ in their habits and tastes. But these are accidental varieties. There is but one perfection to man; one thing most honourable; one thing that, to a well organised and healthful mind, will produce the most exquisite pleasure. All else is deviation and error; a disease, to be cured, not to be encouraged. Sensual pleasure on the one hand, or intellectual on the other, is, absolutely speaking, the highest and most desirable. We are not to make too much account of the perversions of taste. Men long inured to slavery, for example, undoubtedly have a less exquisite



quisite sense of its hatefulness; perhaps instances may be found where it is borne without a murmur. But this is by no means a proof that it is the fit and genuine state of the beings who suffer it. To such men we ought to say, "You are satisfied with an oblivion of all that is eminent in man; but we will awake you. You are contented with ignorance; but we will enlighten you. You are not brutes: you are not stones. You sleep away existence in a miserable neglect of your most valuable privileges: but you are capable of exquisite delights; you are formed to glow with benevolence, to expatiate in the fields of knowledge, to thrill with disinterested transport, to enlarge your thoughts, so as to take in the wonders of the material universe, and the principles that bound and ascertain the general happiness."

If then it appears, that the means which are beneficial to one man, ought, in the most important instances, to be deemed most desirable for others, the same principle which applies to all other sources of moral influence, will also apply to government. Every political system must have a certain influence, upon the moral state of the nation among whom it exists. Some are more favourable, or less inimical, to the general interest, than others. That form of society, which is most conducive to improvement, to the exalted and permanent pleasure of man, the sound politician would wish to see universally realised.



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Different  
degrees in  
which he  
possesses in-  
formation.

Such is the true theory of this subject, taken in its most absolute form ; but there are circumstances that qualify the universality of these principles.

The best gift that can be communicated to man, is valuable only so far as it is esteemed. It is in vain that you heap upon me benefits, that I neither understand nor desire. The faculty of understanding is an essential part of every human being, and cannot with impunity be overlooked, in any attempt to alter or meliorate his condition. Government, in particular, is founded in opinion ; nor can any attempt to govern men, otherwise than in conformity to their own conceptions, be expected to prove salutary. A project therefore to introduce abruptly any species of political institution, merely from a view to its absolute excellence, and without taking into account the state of the public mind, must be absurd and injurious. The best mode of political society, will, no doubt, be considered by the enlightened friend of his species, as the ultimate object of his speculations and efforts. But he will be on his guard against precipitate measures. The only mode for its secure and auspicious establishment, is through the medium of a general preference in its favour.

The consequence which flows from this view of the subject, is, in a certain degree, favourable to the ideas which were stated in the beginning of the chapter, as constituting the more general and prevailing opinion.

‘ Different



‘ Different forms of government, are best adapted to the condition of different nations.’ Yet there is one form, in itself considered, better than any other form. Every other mode of society, except that which conduces to the best and most pleasurable state of the human species, is at most only an object of toleration. It must of necessity be ill in various respects; it must entail mischiefs; it must foster unsocial and immoral prejudices. Yet upon the whole, it may be, like some excrescences and defects in the human frame, it cannot immediately be removed without introducing something worse. In the machine of human society all the wheels must move together. He that should violently attempt to raise any one part into a condition more exalted than the rest, or force it to start away from its fellows, would be the enemy, and not the benefactor, of his contemporaries.

It follows however, from the principles already detailed, that the interests of the human species require a gradual, but uninterrupted change. He who should make these principles the regulators of his conduct, would not rashly insist upon the instant abolition of all existing abuses. But he would not nourish them with false praise. He would show no indulgence to their enormities. He would tell all the truth he could discover, in relation to the genuine interests of mankind. Truth, delivered in a spirit of universal kindness, with no narrow resentments or angry invective, can

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Imperfect  
schemes of  
society esti-  
mated.

Mode in  
which im-  
provements  
are to be  
realised.



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scarcely be dangerous, or fail, so far as relates to its own operation, to communicate a similar spirit to the hearer. Truth, however unreserved be the mode of its enunciation, will be sufficiently gradual in its progress. It will be fully comprehended, only by slow degrees, by its most assiduous votaries; and the degrees will be still more temperate, by which it will pervade so considerable a portion of the community, as to render them mature for a change of their common institutions.

Again: if conviction of the understanding be the compass which is to direct our proceedings in the general affairs, we shall have many reforms, but no revolutions\*. As it is only in a gradual manner that the public can be instructed, a violent explosion in the community, is by no means the most likely to happen, as the result of instruction. Revolutions are the produce of passion, not of sober and tranquil reason. There must be an obstinate resistance to improvement on the one side, to engender a furious determination of realising a system at a stroke on the other. The reformers must have suffered from incessant counteraction, till, inflamed by the treachery and art of their opponents, they are wrought up to the desperate state of imagining that all must be secured in the first favourable crisis, as the only alternative for its being ever secured. It would seem therefore, that the demand of the effectual ally of the public hap-

\* Book IV, Chap. II.



piness, upon those who enjoy the privileges of the state, would be, "Do not give us too soon; do not give us too much; but act under the incessant influence of a disposition to give us something."

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Government, under whatever point of view we examine this topic, is unfortunately pregnant with motives to censure and complaint. Incessant change, everlasting innovation, seem to be dictated by the true interests of mankind. But government is the perpetual enemy of change. What was admirably observed of a particular system of government\*, is in a great degree true of all: They "lay their hand on the spring there is in society, and put a stop to its motion." Their tendency is to perpetuate abuse. Whatever was once thought right and useful, they undertake to entail to the latest posterity. They reverse the genuine propensities of man, and, instead of suffering us to proceed, teach us to look backward for perfection. They prompt us to seek the public welfare, not in alteration and improvement, but in a timid reverence for the decisions of our ancestors, as if it were the nature of the human mind, always to degenerate, and never to advance.

Inference.

Man is in a state of perpetual mutation. He must grow either better or worse, either correct his habits or confirm them. The government under which we are placed, must either increase our passions and prejudices by fanning the flame, or, by

\* The Spartan: Logan's Philosophy of History, p. 69.



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gradually discouraging, tend to extirpate them. In reality, it is impossible to conceive a government that shall have the latter tendency. By its very nature positive institution has a tendency to suspend the elasticity and progress of mind. Every scheme for embodying imperfection must be injurious. That which is to-day a considerable melioration, will at some future period, if preserved unaltered, appear a defect and disease in the body politic. It is earnestly to be desired, that each man should be wise enough to govern himself, without the intervention of any compulsory restraint; and, since government, even in its best state, is an evil, the object principally to be aimed at is, that we should have as little of it, as the general peace of human society will permit.

ENQUIRY



E N Q U I R Y  
CONCERNING  
P O L I T I C A L J U S T I C E.

B O O K IV.

OF THE OPERATION OF OPINION IN SOCIETIES  
AND INDIVIDUALS.

C H A P. I.

OF RESISTANCE,

*Subject of the fourth book.—First branch of the subject.—Question of resistance stated.—Resistance of a nation.—Ambiguity of the term nation.—Case of a military subjection considered.—Resistance of a majority—of a minority.—Further ambiguity of the term nation.—Nature of liberty.—Remark.—Resistance of the individual,*

HAVING now made some progress in the enquiry originally instituted, it may be proper to look back, and consider the point at which we are arrived. We have examined, in the first

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CHAP. I.Subject of  
the fourth  
book.

place, the powers of man as they relate to the subject of which we treat; secondly, we have delineated the principles of society, as founded in justice and general interest, independently of, and antecedent to, every species of political government; and, lastly, have endeavoured to ascertain the fundamental conditions, which must belong to the most rational system of government. We might now proceed to investigate the different objects of government, and deduce the inferences respecting them which are pointed out to us by the preceding reasonings. But there are various miscellaneous considerations which, though they have not fallen under the former heads, are of considerable importance to our disquisition, and may usefully occupy the remainder of the present volume. They are of different classes, and in a certain degree detached from each other; but may perhaps without impropriety be ranged under two branches: the mode in which the speculative opinions of individuals are to be rendered effectual for the melioration of society; and the mode in which opinion is found to operate in modifying the conduct of individuals.

First branch  
of the sub-  
ject.

The strong hold of government has appeared hitherto to have consisted in seduction. However imperfect might be the political constitution under which they lived, mankind have ordinarily been persuaded to regard it with a sort of reverential and implicit respect. The privileges of Englishmen,



men, and the liberties of Germany, the splendour of the most Christian, and the solemn gravity of the Catholic king, have each afforded a subject of exultation to the individuals, who shared, or thought they shared, in the advantages these terms were conceived to describe. Each man was accustomed to deem it a mark of the peculiar kindness of providence, that he was born in the country, whatever it was, to which he happened to belong. The time may come which shall subvert these prejudices. The time may come, when men shall exercise the piercing search of truth upon the mysteries of government, and view without prepossession the defects and abuses of the constitution of their country. Out of this new order of things a new series of duties will arise. When a spirit of impartiality shall prevail, and loyalty shall decay, it will become us to enquire into the conduct which such a state of thinking shall make necessary. We shall then be called upon to maintain a true medium, between blindness to injustice and calamity on the one hand, and an acrimonious spirit of violence and resentment on the other. It will be the duty of such as shall see these subjects in the pure light of truth, to exert themselves for the effectual demolition of monopolies and usurpation; but effectual demolition is not the offspring of crude projects and precipitate measures. He who dedicates himself to these, may be suspected to be under the domination of passion, rather than benevolence. The  
true



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resistance  
stated.

true friend of equality will do nothing unthinkingly, will cherish no wild schemes of uproar and confusion, and will endeavour to discover the mode, in which his faculties may be laid out to the greatest and most permanent advantage.

The whole of this question, is intimately connected with the enquiry, which has necessarily occupied a share in the disquisitions of all writers on the subject of government, concerning the propriety and measures of resistance. “Are the worst government and the best equally entitled to the toleration and forbearance of their subjects? Is there no case of political oppression, that will authorise the persons who suffer it, to take up arms against their oppressors? Or, if there be, what is the quantity of oppression, at the measure of which insurrections begin to be justifiable? Abuses will always exist, for man will always be imperfect; what is the nature of the abuse, which it would be pusillanimous to oppose by words only, and which true courage would instruct us was to be endured no longer?”

No question can be conceived more important than this. In the examination of it philosophy almost forgets its nature; it ceases to be speculation, and becomes an actor. Upon the decision, according as it shall be decided in the minds of a bold and resolute party, the existence of thousands may be suspended. The speculative enquirer, if he live in a state, where abuse is notorious, and grievances frequent, knows not, while he weighs the  
case



case in the balance of reason, how far that which he attempts to describe, is already realised in the apprehension of numbers of his countrymen. Let us enter upon the question, with the seriousness which so critical an enquiry demands.

Resistance may have its source in the emergencies either of the public or the individual. "A nation," it has commonly been said, "has a right to shake off any authority that is usurped over it." This is a proposition that has generally passed without question, and certainly no proposition can appear more plausible. But, if we examine it minutely, we shall find that it is attended with equivocal circumstances. What do we mean by a nation? Is the whole people concerned in this resistance, or only a part? If the whole be prepared to resist, the whole is persuaded of the injustice of the usurpation. What sort of usurpation is that, which can be exercised by one or a few persons, over a whole nation, universally disapproving of it? Government is founded in opinion\*. Bad government deceives us first, before it fastens itself upon us like an incubus, oppressing all our efforts. A nation in general must have learned to respect a king and a house of lords, before a king and a house of lords can exercise any authority over them. If a man or a set of men, unsanctioned by any previous prejudice in their favour, pretend to exercise sovereignty in a country, they will become objects of derision,

Resistance  
of a nation.  
Ambiguity  
of the term  
nation.

\* Book I, Chap. VI, p. 98; Book II, Chap. III, p. 144.

rather



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CHAP. I.

Case of mi-  
litary sub-  
jection con-  
sidered;

rather than of serious resistance. Destroy the existing prejudice in favour of any of our present institutions, and they will fall into similar disuse and contempt.

It has sometimes been supposed, “that an army, foreign or domestic, may be sufficient to hold a people in subjection, completely against their inclination.” A domestic army at least, will in some degree partake of the opinions and sentiments of the people at large. The more precautions are employed to prevent the infection, the doctrine will probably spread with so much the more certainty and rapidity. Show me that you are afraid of my entertaining certain opinions or hearing certain principles, and you will infallibly, sooner or later, awaken my curiosity. A domestic army will always be found a very doubtful instrument of tyranny in a period of crisis.—A foreign army after a time will become domesticated. If the question be, of importing a foreign army, for the specific purpose of supporting tottering abuse, great alarm will inevitably be excited. These men, it may be, are adapted for continuing the reign of tyranny; but who will pay them? A weak, superstitious or ignorant people may be held in the chains of foreign power; but the school of moral and political independence, sends forth pupils of a very different character. In the encounter with their penetration and discernment, tyranny will feel itself powerless and transitory. In a word, either the people are unenlightened and unprepared for a state of freedom,



dom, and then the struggle and the consequences of the struggle will be truly perilous ; or the progress of political knowledge among them is decisive, and then every one will see how futile and short-lived will be the attempt to hold them in subjection, by means of garrisons and a foreign force. The party attached to liberty is, upon that supposition, the numerous one ; they are the persons of true energy, and who have an object worthy of their zeal. Their oppressors, few in number, and degraded to the rank of lifeless machines, wander with no certain destination or prospect, over the vast surface, and are objects of pity, rather than serious alarm. Every hour diminishes their number and their resources ; while, on the other hand, every moment's delay gives new strength to the cause, and fortitude to the champions, of liberty. Men would not be inclined pertinaciously to object to a short delay, if they recollected the advantages and the certainty of success with which it is pregnant.—Meanwhile these reasonings turn upon the probability, that the purposes of liberty will be full as effectually answered, without the introduction of force : there can be little doubt of the justifiableness, of a whole nation having recourse to arms, if a case can be made out, in which it shall be impossible for them to prevent the introduction of slavery in any other way.

The same reasonings, with little variation, will apply to the case of an unquestionable majority of a nation, as to that of the whole. The majority of a nation

Resistance  
of a majority :



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a nation is irresistible ; it as little needs to have recourse to violence ; there is as little reason to expect that any usurper will be so mad as to contend with it. If ever it appear to be otherwise, it is because, in one of two ways, we deceive ourselves with the term majority. First, nothing is more obvious, than the danger incident to a man of a sanguine temper, of over estimating the strength of his party. He associates perhaps only with persons of his own way of thinking, and a very small number appears to him as if it were the whole world. Ask persons of different tempers and habits of life, how many republicans there are at this hour in England or Scotland, and you will immediately be struck with the very opposite answers you will receive. There are many errors of a sanguine temper that appear, at first sight, innocent or even useful : but surely every man of integrity and conscience will hesitate, before he suffers the possibility, that an error of this sort should encourage him to plunge a nation in violence, and open a sea of blood. He must have a heart of strange composition, who, for the precarious inferences he draws in moral or political calculation, would volunteer a mandate of death, or be the first to unsheath the sword of summary execution.

A second deception that lurks under the word majority, lies, not in the question of number, but of quality and degree of illumination. A majority, we say perhaps, is dissatisfied with the present state  
of



of things, and wishes for such a specific alteration. Alas, it is to be feared, that the greater part of this majority are often mere parrots, who have been taught a lesson, of the subject of which they understand little or nothing. What is it they dislike? A specific tax perhaps, or some temporary grievance. Do they dislike the vice and meanness that grow out of tyranny, and pant for the liberal and ingenuous virtue, that would be fostered in their own minds in a different condition? No. They are very angry, and fancy themselves very judicious. What is it they desire? They know not. It would probably be easy to show, that what they profess to desire, is little better than what they hate. What they hate, is not the general depravation of the human character; and what they desire, is not its improvement. It is an insult upon human understanding, when we speak of persons in this state of infantine ignorance, to say that the majority of the nation is on the side of political renovation. Few greater misfortunes can befall any country, than for such persons to be instigated to subvert existing institutions, and violently to take the work of political reformation into their own hands.

There is an obvious remedy to each of the deceptions here enumerated: Time. Is it doubtful whether the reformers be a real majority of the inhabitants of any country? Is it doubtful whether the majority truly understand the object of their  
professed



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professed wishes, and therefore whether they be ripe for its reception, and competent to its assertion? Wait but a little while, and the doubt will probably be solved, in the manner that the warmest friend of human happiness and improvement would desire. If the system of independence and equality be the truth, it may be expected hourly to gain converts. The more it is discussed, the more will it be understood, and its value cherished and felt. If the state of the majority be doubtful, a very few years, perhaps a shorter time, will tend to place it beyond the reach of controversy. The great cause of humanity, which is now pleading in the face of the universe, has but two enemies; those friends of antiquity, and those friends of innovation, who, impatient of suspense, are inclined violently to interrupt the calm, the incessant, the rapid and auspicious progress which thought and reflection appear to be making in the world. Happy would it be for mankind, if those persons who interest themselves most zealously in these great questions, would confine their exertions, to the diffusing, in every possible mode, a spirit of enquiry, and the embracing every opportunity of increasing the stock, and generalising the communication, of political knowledge!

of a minority.

A third situation, which may be conceived to exist in a country, where political reform has been made a topic of considerable attention, is that, where neither the whole, nor the majority, of the nation



nation, is desirous of the reform in question, but where the innovators are an unquestionable minority. In this case nothing can be more indefensible, than a project for introducing by violence that state of society, which our judgments may happen to approve. In the first place, no persons are ripe for the participation of a benefit, the advantage of which they do not understand. No people are competent to enjoy a state of freedom, who are not already imbued with a love of freedom. The most dreadful tragedies will infallibly result, from an attempt to goad mankind prematurely into a position, however abstractedly excellent, for which they are in no degree prepared. Secondly, to endeavour to impose our sentiments by force, is the most detestable species of persecution. Others are as much entitled to deem themselves in the right as we are. The most sacred of all privileges, is that, by which each man has a certain sphere, relative to the government of his own actions, and the exercise of his discretion, not liable to be trenched upon by the intemperate zeal or dictatorial temper of his neighbour\*. To drag men into the adoption of what we think right, is an intolerable tyranny. It leads to unlimited disorder and injustice. Every man thinks himself in the right; and, if such a proceeding were universally introduced, the destiny of mankind would be no longer a question of argument, but of strength, presumption or intrigue.

\* Book II, Chap. V, VI.



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Further ambiguity of the term nation.

There is a further ambiguity in the term nation, as employed in the proposition above stated, "that a nation has a right forcibly to shake off any authority that is usurped over it." A nation is an arbitrary term. Which is most properly termed a nation; the Russian empire, or the canton of Berne? Or, is every thing a nation, upon which accident shall bestow that appellation? It seems most accurate to say, that any number of persons, who are able to establish and maintain a system of mutual regulation for themselves conformable to their own opinions, without imposing a system of regulation upon a considerable number of others inconsistent with the opinion of these others, have a right, or, more properly speaking, a duty obliging them, to adopt that measure. That any man, or body of men, should impose their sense upon persons of a different opinion, is, absolutely speaking, wrong, and in all cases deeply to be regretted: but this evil it is perhaps in some degree necessary to incur, for the sake of a preponderating good. All government includes in it this evil, as one of its fundamental characteristics.

Nature of liberty.

There is one circumstance, of much importance to be attended to in this disquisition. Superficial thinkers lay great stress upon the external situation of men, and little upon their internal sentiments. Persevering enquiry will probably lead to a mode of thinking the reverse of this. To be free is a circumstance of little value, if we could suppose  
men



men in a state of external freedom, without the magnanimity, energy and firmness, that constitute almost all that is valuable in a state of freedom. On the other hand, if a man have these qualities, there is little left for him to desire. He cannot be degraded; he cannot readily become either useless or unhappy. He smiles at the impotence of despotism; he fills up his existence with serene enjoyment and industrious benevolence. Civil liberty is chiefly desirable, as a means to procure and perpetuate this temper of mind. They therefore begin at the wrong end, who make haste to overturn and confound the usurped powers of the world. Make men wise, and by that very operation you make them free. Civil liberty follows as a consequence of this; no usurped power can stand against the artillery of opinion. Every thing then is in order, and succeeds at its appointed time. How unfortunate is it, that men are so eager to strike, and have so little constancy to reason!

It is probable, that this question of resistance would never have admitted of so long a controversy, if the advocates of the system of liberty promulgated in the last century, had not, unobserved to themselves, introduced a confusion into the question. Resistance may be employed, either to repel the injuries committed against the nation generally, or such as, in their immediate application, relate to the individual. To the first of these the preceding reasonings principally apply. The injuries to a

Remark.



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CHAP. I.

nation depend for their nature, for the most part, upon their permanency, and therefore admit of the utmost sobriety and deliberation as to the mode in which they are to be remedied. Individuals may be injured or destroyed by a specific act of tyranny, but nations cannot; the principal mischief to the nation lies in the presage contained in the single act, of the injustice that is to continue to be exercised. Resistance, by the very meaning of the term, as it is used in political enquiry, signifies a species of conduct that is to be adopted, in relation to an established authority: but an old grievance, seems obviously to lead, as its counterpart, to a gradual and temperate remedy.

Resistance  
of the indi-  
vidual,

The consideration which, by being confounded with this, has served to mislead certain enquirers, is that of what is commonly known by the name of self-defence, or, more properly, the duty obliging each individual to repel, as far as lies in his power, any violent attack made either upon himself or another. This, by the terms of the question, is a circumstance that does not admit of delay; the benefit of the remedy entirely depends upon the time of the application. The principle in this case is of easy development. Force is an expedient, the use of which is much to be deplored. It is contrary to the nature of intellect, which cannot be improved but by conviction and persuasion. It corrupts the man that employs it, and the man upon whom it is employed. But it seems that



there are certain cases, so urgent, as to oblige us to have recourse to this injurious expedient : in other words, there are cases, where the mischief to accrue from not violently counteracting the perverseness of the individual, is greater, than the mischief which the violence necessarily draws along with it. Hence it appears, that the ground justifying resistance, in every case where it can be justified, is that of the good, likely to result from such interference, being greater than the good to result from omitting it.

There are probably cases, where, as in a murder for example about to be committed on a useful and valuable member of society, the chance of preventing it, by any other means than instantaneous resistance, is so small, as by no means to vindicate us in incurring the danger of so mischievous a catastrophe. But will this justify us, in the case of an individual oppressed by the authority of a community? Let us suppose, that there is a country, in which some of its best citizens are selected as objects of vengeance, by an alarmed and jealous tyranny. It cannot reasonably be doubted, that every man, a condemned felon or murderer, is to be commended, for quietly withdrawing himself from the execution of the law ; much more such persons as have now been described. But ought those well affected citizens that are still at large, to rise in behalf of their brethren under persecution? Every man that is disposed to enter into such a project, and who is anxious about the moral rectitude of his

S 3

conduct,



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CHAP. I.

conduct, must rest its justification upon one of the two grounds above stated: either the immediate purpose of his rising is the melioration of public institutions, or it is to be estimated with reference to the meritoriousness of the individuals in question. The first of these has been sufficiently discussed; we will suppose therefore that he confines himself to the last. Here, as has been already observed, the whole, as a moral question, will turn upon the comparative benefit or mischief to result from the resistance to be employed. The disparity is great indeed, between the resistance ordinarily suggested by the term self-defence, and the resistance which must expect to encounter in its progress the civil power of the country. In the first, the question is of a moment; if you succeed in the instant of your exertion, you may expect the applause, rather than the prosecution, of executive authority. But, in the latter, the end will scarcely be accomplished, but by the overthrow of the government itself. Let the lives of the individuals in supposition be as valuable as you please, the value will necessarily be swallowed up, in the greater questions that occur in the sequel. Those questions therefore are the proper topics of attention; and we shall be to blame, if we suffer ourselves to be led unawares, into a conduct, the direct tendency of which is the production of one sort of event, while all we intended was the production of another. The value of individuals ought not to be forgotten; there are men whose safety



safety should be cherished by us with anxious attention; but it is difficult to imagine a case, in which, for their sake, the lives of thousands, and the fate of millions, should be committed to risk.

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## CHAP. II.

### OF REVOLUTIONS.

*Duty of a citizen as to the constitution of his country.—*

*No scheme of government perfect or final.—Revolutionary measures, during their operation, inimical to independence—and intellectual enquiry.—Period of their operation.—Revolutions accompanied with blood—crude and premature in their effects—uncertain in point of success.—Conviction of the understanding an adequate means of demolishing political abuse.—The progress of conviction not tardy and feeble—not precarious.—Revolutions in some cases to be looked for.*

**T**HE question of resistance is closely connected with that of revolutions. It may be proper therefore, before we dismiss this part of the subject, to enter into some disquisition, respecting the nature and effects of that species of event which is commonly known by this appellation, and the sentiments which a good citizen should entertain concerning it.

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Duty of a  
citizen as to  
the constitu-  
tion of his  
country.

And here one of the first observations that offers itself is, that it is not unworthy of a good member of society to be the adversary of the constitution of his country.

In contradiction to this proposition it has been said, "that we live under the protection of this constitution; and protection, being a benefit conferred, obliges us to a reciprocation of support in return."

To this it may be answered, first, that the benefit of this protection is somewhat equivocal. That civilisation is a benefit, may perhaps be conceded; but civilisation, though in some degree preserved by the political constitution of every country in Europe, can scarcely be considered as the characteristic of a bad constitution, or as inseparably involved with the imperfections of any. A good member of society will, probably, be anxious to favour the cause of civilisation; but his attachment to that cause, may well excite his wishes, to see it freed from the slough of corrupt and partial institutions.

Secondly, gratitude, in the sense in which it is here spoken of, has already been proved not to be a virtue, but a vice. Every man and collection of men ought to be treated by us, in a manner founded upon their intrinsic qualities and capacities, and not according to a rule, which has existence only in relation to ourselves\*.

Add to this, thirdly, that no motive can be more

\* Book II, Chap. II, p. 128.

equivocal,



equivocal, than the gratitude here recommended. Gratitude to the constitution, an abstract idea, an imaginary existence, is altogether unintelligible. Affection to my countrymen will be much better proved, by exertions to procure them a substantial benefit, than by my supporting a system which I believe to be fraught with injurious consequences.

A demand of the nature which is here controverted, is similar to the demand upon me to be a Christian because I am an Englishman, or a Mahometan because I am a native of Turkey. Instead of being an expression of respect, it argues contempt of all religion and government, and every thing sacred among men. If government be an institution conducive to the public welfare, it deserves my attention and investigation. I am bound, in proportion as I desire the happiness of others, to consider it with all the accuracy my circumstances will allow, and employ my talents, and every honest influence I am able to exert, to render it such as justice and reason may require.

This general view of the duties of a citizen in relation to the government under which he lives being premised, we may now proceed with advantage to the particular points, which are calculated to influence our judgment, as to the conduct we ought to hold with respect to revolutions.

There is one extensive view upon the subject of revolutions, which will be of great consequence in determining the sentiments and conduct we ought to

No scheme  
of govern-  
ment perfect  
or final.



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to maintain respecting them. The wise man is satisfied with nothing. It is scarcely possible there should be any institution, in which impartial disquisition will not find defects. The wise man is not satisfied with his own attainments, or even with his principles and opinions. He is continually detecting errors in them ; he suspects more ; there is no end to his revivals and enquiries. Government is in its nature an expedient, a recourse to something ill to prevent an impending mischief ; it affords therefore no ground of complete satisfaction. Finite things must be perpetually capable of increase and advancement ; it would argue therefore extreme folly, to rest in any given state of improvement, and imagine we had attained our summit. The true politician confines neither his expectations nor desires within any specific limits ; he has undertaken a labour without end. He does not say, " Let me attain thus much, and I will be contented ; I will demand no more ; I will no longer counteract the established order of things ; I will set those who support them at rest from further importunity." On the contrary, the whole period of his existence, is devoted to the promotion of innovation and reform.

The direct inference from these sentiments seems to be unfavourable to revolutions. The politician who aims at a limited object, and has shut up his views within that object, may be forgiven, if he manifest some impatience for its attainment. But  
this



this passion cannot be felt in an equal degree, by him who aims at improvement, not upon a definite, but an indefinite scale. This man knows that, when he has carried any particular point, his task is far from complete. He knows that, when government has been advanced one degree higher in excellence, abuses will still be numerous. Many will be oppressed; many will be exposed to unjust condemnation; discontent will have its empire and its votaries; and the reign of inequality will be extensive. He can mark therefore the progress of melioration with calmness; though it will have all the wishes of his heart, and all the exertions of his understanding. That progress, which may be carried on, through a longer time, and a greater variety of articles, than his foresight can delineate, he may be expected to desire should take place in a mild and gradual, though incessant advance, not by violent leaps, not by concussions which may expose millions to risk, and sweep generations of men from the stage of existence.

And here let us briefly consider what is the nature of revolution. Revolution is engendered by an indignation against tyranny, yet is itself evermore pregnant with tyranny. The tyranny which excites its indignation, can scarcely be without its partisans; and, the greater is the indignation excited, and the more sudden and vast the fall of the oppressors, the deeper will be the resentment which fills the minds of the losing party. What more unavoidable,

Revolutionary measures, during their operation, inimical to independence:



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avoidable, than that men should entertain some discontent, at being violently stripped of their wealth and their privileges? What more venial, than that they should feel some attachment, to the sentiments in which they were educated, and which, it may be, but a little before, were the sentiments of almost every individual in the community? Are they obliged to change their creed, precisely at the time at which I see reason to alter mine? They have but remained at the point at which we both stood a few years ago. Yet this is the crime, which a revolution watches with the greatest jealousy, and punishes with the utmost severity. The crime which is thus marked with the deepest reprobation, is not the result of relaxation of principle, of profligate living, or of bitter and inexorable hatred. It is a fault, not the least likely to occur, in a man of untainted honour, of an upright disposition, and dignified and generous sentiments.

Revolution is instigated by a horror against tyranny, yet its own tyranny is not without peculiar aggravations. There is no period more at war with the existence of liberty. The unrestrained communication of opinions has always been subjected to mischievous counteraction, but upon such occasions it is trebly fettered. At other times men are not so much alarmed for its effects. But in a moment of revolution, when every thing is in crisis, the influence even of a word is dreaded, and the consequent slavery is complete. Where was there  
a revo-



a revolution, in which a strong vindication of what it was intended to abolish, was permitted, or indeed almost any species of writing or argument, that was not, for the most part, in harmony with the opinions which happened to prevail? An attempt to scrutinise men's thoughts, and punish their opinions, is of all kinds of despotism the most odious; yet this attempt is peculiarly characteristic of a period of revolution.

The advocates of revolution usually remark, "that there is no way to rid ourselves of our oppressors, and prevent new ones from starting up in their room, but by inflicting on them some severe and memorable retribution." Upon this statement it is particularly to be observed, that there will be oppressors, as long as there are individuals inclined, either from perverseness, or rooted and obstinate prejudice, to take party with the oppressor. We have therefore to terrify, not only the man of crooked ambition, but all those who would support him, either from a corrupt motive, or a well-intended error. Thus, we propose to make men free; and the method we adopt, is to influence them, more rigorously than ever, by the fear of punishment. We say that government has usurped too much, and we organise a government, tenfold more encroaching in its principles, and terrible in its proceedings. Is slavery the best project that can be devised, for making men free? Is a display of terror the readiest



BOOK IV.  
CHAP. II.and intel-  
lectual en-  
quiry.

est mode, for rendering them fearless, independent and enterprising?

During a period of revolution, enquiry, and all those patient speculations to which mankind are indebted for their greatest improvements, are suspended. Such speculations demand a period of security and permanence; they can scarcely be pursued, when men cannot foresee what shall happen to-morrow, and the most astonishing vicissitudes are affairs of perpetual recurrence. Such speculations demand leisure, and a tranquil and dispassionate temper; they can scarcely be pursued, when all the passions of man are afloat, and we are hourly under the strongest impressions, of fear and hope, apprehension and desire, dejection and triumph. Add to this, what has been already stated\*, respecting the tendency of revolution, to restrain the declaration of our thoughts, and put fetters upon the licence of investigation.

Period of  
their opera-  
tion.

Another circumstance proper to be mentioned, is the inevitable duration of the revolutionary spirit. This may be illustrated from the change of government in England in 1688. If we look at the revolution strictly so called, we are apt to congratulate ourselves that the advantages it procured, to whatever they may amount, were purchased by a cheap and bloodless victory. But, if we would make a solid estimate, we must recollect it as the procuring cause of two general wars, of nine years under king

\* Page 268.



William, and twelve under queen Anne; and two intestine rebellions (events worthy of execration, if we call to mind the gallant spirit and generous fidelity of the Jacobites, and their miserable end) in 1715 and 1745. Yet this was, upon the whole, a mild and auspicious revolution. Revolutions are a struggle between two parties, each persuaded of the justice of its cause, a struggle, not decided by compromise or patient expostulation, but by force only. Such a decision can scarcely be expected to put an end to the mutual animosity and variance.

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Perhaps no important revolution was ever bloodless. It may be useful in this place, to recollect in what the mischief of shedding blood consists. The abuses which at present exist in political society are so enormous, the oppressions which are exercised so intolerable, the ignorance and vice they entail so dreadful, that possibly a dispassionate enquirer might decide that, if their annihilation could be purchased, by an instant sweeping of every human being now arrived at years of maturity, from the face of the earth, the purchase would not be too dear. It is not because human life is of so considerable value, that we ought to recoil from the shedding of blood. Alas! the men that now exist, are for the most part poor and scanty in their portion of enjoyment, and their dignity is no more than a name. Death is in itself among the slightest of human evils. An earthquake, which should swallow up a hundred thousand individuals at once, would chiefly be to be regretted

Revolutions  
accompanied  
with  
blood:



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regretted for the anguish it entailed upon survivors; in a fair estimate of those it destroyed, it would often be comparatively a trivial event. The laws of nature which produce it, are a fit subject of investigation; but their effects, contrasted with many other events, are scarcely a topic of regret. The case is altogether different, when man falls by the hand of his neighbour. Here a thousand ill passions are generated. The perpetrators, and the witnesses of murders, become obdurate, unrelenting and inhuman. Those who sustain the loss of relations or friends by a catastrophe of this sort, are filled with indignation and revenge. Distrust is propagated from man to man, and the dearest ties of human society are dissolved. It is impossible to devise a temper, more inauspicious to the cultivation of justice, and the diffusion of benevolence.

crude and  
premature  
in their ef-  
fects :

To the remark, that revolutions can scarcely be unaccompanied with the shedding of blood, it may be added that they are necessarily crude and premature. Politics is a science. The general features of the nature of man are capable of being understood, and a mode may be delineated which, in itself considered, is best adapted to the condition of man in society. If this mode ought not, every where, and instantly, to be sought to be reduced into practice, the modifications that are to be given it in conformity to the variation of circumstances, and the degrees in which it is to be realised, are also a topic of scientific disquisition. Now it is clearly  
the



the nature of science to be progressive in its advances. How various were the stages of astronomy, before it received the degree of perfection which was given it by Newton? How imperfect were the lisplings of intellectual science, before it attained the precision of the present century? Political knowledge is, no doubt, in its infancy; and, as it is an affair of life and action, will, in proportion as it gathers vigour, manifest a more uniform and less precarious influence upon the concerns of human society. It is the history of all science to be known first to a few, before it descends through the various descriptions and classes of the community. Thus, for twenty years, the Principia of Newton had scarcely any readers, and his system continued unknown; the next twenty perhaps sufficed to make the outlines of that system familiar, to almost every person, in the slightest degree, tinged with science.

The only method according to which social improvements can be carried on, with sufficient prospect of an auspicious event, is, when the improvement of our institutions advances, in a just proportion to the illumination of the public understanding. There is a condition of political society best adapted to every different stage of individual improvement. The more nearly this condition is successively realised, the more advantageously will the general interest be consulted. There is a sort of provision in the nature of the human mind for this



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species of progress. Imperfect institutions, as has already been shown \*, cannot long support themselves, when they are generally disapproved of, and their effects truly understood. There is a period, at which they may be expected to decline and expire, almost without an effort. Reform, under this meaning of the term, can scarcely be considered as of the nature of action. Men feel their situation; and the restraints that shackled them before, vanish like a deception. When such a crisis has arrived, not a sword will need to be drawn, not a finger to be lifted up in purposes of violence. The adversaries will be too few and too feeble, to be able to entertain a serious thought of resistance against the universal sense of mankind.

Under this view of the subject then it appears, that revolutions, instead of being truly beneficial to mankind, answer no other purpose, than that of marring the salutary and uninterrupted progress, which might be expected to attend upon political truth and social improvement. They disturb the harmony of intellectual nature. They propose to give us something, for which we are not prepared, and which we cannot effectually use. They suspend the wholesome advancement of science, and confound the process of nature and reason.

uncertain  
in point of  
success.

We have hitherto argued, upon the supposition that the attempt which shall be made to effect a

\* Book I, Chap. VI.

revolution,



revolution, shall be crowned with success. But this supposition must by no means be suffered to pass without notice. Every attempt of this sort, even if menaced only, and not carried into act, tends to excite a resistance which otherwise would never be consolidated. The enemies of innovation become alarmed by the intemperance of its friends. The storm gradually thickens, and each party arms itself in silence with the weapons of violence and stratagem. Let us observe the consequence of this. So long as the contest is merely between truth and sophistry, we may look with tolerable assurance to the progress and result. But, when we lay aside arguments, and have recourse to the sword, the case is altered. Amidst the barbarous rage of war, and the clamorous din of civil contention, who shall tell whether the event will be prosperous or adverse? The consequence may be, the riveting on us anew the chains of despotism, and insuring, through a considerable period, the triumph of oppression, even if it should fail to carry us back to a state of torpor, and obliterate the memory of all our improvements.

If such are the genuine features of revolution, it will be fortunate, if it can be made appear, that revolution is wholly unnecessary, and the conviction of the understanding a means fully adequate to the demolishing political abuse. But this point has already been established in a former part of our enquiry \*. It is common to affirm, "that men

Conviction  
of the un-  
derstanding  
an adequate  
means of  
demolishing  
political  
abuse.

\* Book I, Chap. V.



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may sufficiently know the error of their conduct, and yet be in no degree inclined to forsake it." This assertion however is no otherwise rendered plausible, than by the vague manner in which we are accustomed to understand the term, knowledge. The voluntary actions of men originate in their opinions \*. Whatever we believe to have the strongest inducements in its behalf, that we infallibly choose and pursue. It is impossible that we should choose any thing as evil. It is impossible that a man should perpetrate a crime, in the moment that he sees it in all its enormity. In every example of this sort, there is a struggle between knowledge on one side, and error or habit on the other. While the knowledge continues in all its vigour, the ill action cannot be perpetrated. In proportion as the knowledge escapes from the mind, and is no longer recollected, the error or habit may prevail. But it is reasonable to suppose that the permanence, as well as vigour, of our perceptions, is capable of being increased to an indefinite extent. Knowledge in this sense, understanding by it a clear and undoubting apprehension, such as no delusion can resist, is a thing totally different from what is ordinarily called by that name, from a sentiment seldom recollected, and, when it is recollected, scarcely felt or understood \*.

The progress of conviction not tardy and feeble :

The beauty of the conception here delineated, of the political improvement of mankind, must be palpable to every observer. Still it may be urged,

\* Book I, Chap. V.

" that,



“that, even granting this, truth may be too tardy in its operation. Ages will elapse,” we shall be told, “before speculative views of the evils of privilege and monopoly, shall have spread so wide, and been felt so deeply, as to banish these evils without commotion or struggle. It is easy for a reasoner to sit down in his closet, and amuse himself with the beauty of the conception; but in the mean time mankind are suffering, injustice is hourly perpetrated, and generations of men may languish, in the midst of fair promises and hopes, and leave the stage without participating in the benefit. Cheat us not then,” it will be said, “with remote and uncertain prospects; but let us embrace a method, which shall secure us speedy deliverance, from evils too hateful to be endured.”

In answer to this representation, it is to be observed, first, that every attempt, suddenly to rescue a whole community, from an usurpation, the evils of which few understand, has already been shown to be attended, always with calamity, frequently with miscarriage.

Secondly, it is a mistake to suppose that, because we have no popular commotions and violence, the generation in which we live, will have no benefit from the improvement of our political principles. Every change of sentiment, from moral delusion to truth, every addition we make, to the clearness of our apprehension on this subject, and the recollect-  
edness and independence of our mind, is itself,



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abstracted from the absolute change of our institutions, an unquestionable acquisition. Freedom of institution is desirable, chiefly because it is connected with independence of mind; if we gain the end, we may reasonably consent to be less solicitous about the means\*. In reality however, wherever the political opinions of a community, or any considerable portion of a community, are changed, the institutions are affected also. They relax their hold upon the mind; they are viewed with a different spirit; they gradually, and almost without notice, sink into oblivion. The advantage gained in every stage of the progress without commotion, is nearly the precise advantage it is most for the interest of the public to secure.

In the mean time it is impossible not to remark a striking futility, in the objection we are endeavouring to answer. The objectors complain, "that the system which trusts to reason alone, is calculated to deprive the present generation, of the practical benefit of political improvements." Yet we have just shown that it secures to them great practical benefit; while, on the other hand, nothing is more common, than to hear the advocates of force themselves confess, that a grand revolution includes in it the sacrifice of one generation. Its conductors encounter the calamities attendant on fundamental innovation, that their posterity may reap the fruits in tranquillity.

\* Chap. I, p. 258.

Thirdly,



Thirdly, it is a mistake to suppose, that the system of trusting to reason alone, is calculated to place fundamental reform at an immeasurable distance. It is the nature of all science and improvement, to be slow, and in a manner imperceptible, in its first advances. Its commencement is as it were by accident. Few advert to it; few have any perception of its existence. It attains its growth in obscurity; and its result, though long in the preparation, is to a considerable degree sudden and unexpected. Thus it is perhaps, that we ought to regard the introduction of printing, as having given its full security to the emancipation of mankind. But this progressive consequence was long unsuspected; and it was reserved for the penetrating mind of Wolsey, to predict almost three centuries ago, speaking in the name of the Romish clergy, "We must destroy the press; or the press will destroy us." At present, it requires no extraordinary sagacity to perceive, that the most enormous abuses of political institution are hastening to their end. There is no enemy to this auspicious crisis more to be feared, than the well meaning, but intemperate, champion of the general good.

There is a passage in a work of Helvetius written to be published after his death, which happened in 1771, so much in the tone of the dissatisfied and despairing advocates of public liberty at present, as to deserve to be cited in this place. "In the history of every people," says he, "there are mo-



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ments in which, uncertain of the side they shall choose, and balanced between political good and evil, they feel a desire to be instructed ; in which the soil, so to express myself, is in some manner prepared, and may easily be penetrated by the dew of truth. At such a moment, the publication of a valuable book, may give birth to the most auspicious reforms : but, when that moment is no more, the nation, become insensible to the best motives, is, by the nature of its government, irrecoverably plunged in ignorance and stupidity. The soil of intellect is then hard and impenetrable ; the rains may fall, may spread their moisture upon the surface, but the prospect of fertility is gone. Such is the condition of France. Her people are become the contempt of Europe. No salutary crisis shall ever restore them to liberty\*.”

It is scarcely necessary to add, that the French revolution was at this time preparing by an incessant

\* “ Dans chaque nation il est des momens où les citoyens, incertains du parti qu'ils doivent prendre, et suspendus entre un bon et un mauvais gouvernement, éprouvent la soif de l'instruction, où les esprits, si je l'ose dire, préparés et ameublés peuvent être facilement pénétrés de la rosée de la vérité. Qu'en ce moment un bon ouvrage paroisse, il peut opérer d'heureuses réformes : mais cet instant passé, les citoyens, insensibles à la gloire, sont par la forme de leur gouvernement invinciblement entraînés vers l'ignorance et l'abrutissement. Alors les esprits sont la terre endurcie : l'eau de la vérité y tombe, y coule, mais sans la féconder. Tel est l'état de la France. Cette nation avilie est aujourd'hui le mépris de l'Europe. Nulle crise salutaire ne lui rendra la liberté.”

De l'Homme, Préface.

fant



fant chain of events; and that the train may particularly be considered as taking its date, from the circumstance, the destruction of the parliaments by Louis XV, which inspired Helvetius with so melancholy a presage.

An additional support to the objection we are here attempting to remove, may be derived from the idea, not only “that truth is slow in its progress,” but “that it is not always progressive, but subject, like other human things, to the vicissitudes of flux and reflux.” This opinion has hitherto been of great influence in public affairs, and it has been considered as “the part of a wise statesman, to embrace the opportunity, when the people are inclined to any measure in which he wishes to engage them, and not to wait, till their fervour has subsided, and the moment of willing co-operation is past.”

Undoubtedly there is the appearance of flux and reflux in human affairs. In subordinate articles, there will be a fashion, rendering one truth more popular, and more an object of attention, at one time, than at another. But the mass of truth seems too large a consideration, to be susceptible of these vicissitudes. It has proceeded, from the revival of letters to the present hour, with an irresistible advance; and the apparent deviousnesses of literature, seem to resolve themselves into a grand collective consistency. Not one step has been made in retrogression. Mathematics, natural philosophy, moral philosophy,



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philosophy, philology and politics, have reached, by regular improvements, to their present degree of perfection.

“But, whatever may be said of the history of the human mind, since the revival of letters, its history from the earliest records of man, displays a picture of a different sort. Here certainly it has not been all progression. Greece and Rome present themselves, like two favoured spots in the immense desert of intellect; and their glory in this respect, was exceedingly transient. Athens arrived at an excellence so great, in poetry, in eloquence, in the acuteness and vigour of its philosophers, and in skill in the fine arts, as all the ages of the world are not able to parallel. But this skill was attained, only to be afterwards forgotten; it was succeeded by a night of barbarism; and we are at this moment, in some of these points, exerting ourselves to arrive at the ground, which they formerly occupied. The same remarks which apply to individual improvement, equally apply to the subject of politics; we have not yet realised the political advantages, to which they were indebted for their greatness.”

There is but one consideration that can be opposed to this statement: the discovery of printing. By this art we seem to be secured against the future perishing of human improvement. Knowledge is communicated to too many individuals, to afford its adversaries a chance of suppressing it. The monopoly of science, though, from the love of distinction,



tion, which so extensively characterises the human race, it has been endeavoured to be prolonged, is substantially at an end. By the easy multiplication of copies, and the cheapness of books, every one has access to them. The extreme inequality of information among different members of the same community, which existed in ancient times, is diminished. A class of men is become numerous, which was then comparatively unknown, and we see vast multitudes who, though condemned to labour for the perpetual acquisition of the means of subsistence, have yet a superficial knowledge of most of the discoveries and topics which are investigated by the learned. The consequence is, that, the possessors of knowledge being more, its influence is more certain. Under different circumstances, it was occasionally only that men were wrought upon to extraordinary exertions; but with us the whole is regular and systematical.

There is one general observation which ought to be made, before the subject is dismissed. It has perhaps sufficiently appeared, from the preceding discussion, that revolutions are necessarily attended with many circumstances worthy of our disapprobation, and that they are by no means essential to the political improvement of mankind. Yet, after all, it ought not to be forgotten, that, though the connection be not essential or requisite, revolutions and violence have too often been coeval with important changes of the social system. What has so often

Revolutions  
in some  
cases to be  
looked for.



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often happened in time past, is not unlikely occasionally to happen in future. The duty therefore of the true politician, is to postpone revolution, if he cannot entirely prevent it. It is reasonable to believe that, the later it occurs, and the more generally ideas of political good and evil are previously understood, the shorter, and the less deplorable, will be the mischiefs attendant on revolution. The friend of human happiness, will endeavour to prevent violence; but it would be the mark of a weak and valetudinarian temper, to turn away our eyes from human affairs in disgust, and refuse to contribute our labours and attention to the general weal, because perhaps, at last, violence may forcibly intrude itself. It is our duty, to make a proper advantage of circumstances as they arise, and not to withdraw ourselves, because every thing is not conducted according to our ideas of propriety. The men who grow angry with corruption, and impatient at injustice, and through those sentiments favour the abettors of revolution, have an obvious apology to palliate their error; theirs is the excess of a virtuous feeling. At the same time, however amiable may be the source of their error, the error itself is probably fraught with consequences pernicious to mankind.

CHAP.



## CHAP. III.

## OF POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS.

*Arguments in their favour.—Answer.—Associations put a part for the whole—are attended with party spirit—declamation—cabal—contentious disputes—restlessness—and tumult.—Utility of social communication.—Exception in favour of associations.—Another exception.—Conclusion.*

A QUESTION suggests itself under this branch of enquiry, respecting the propriety of associations among the people at large, for the purpose of operating a change in their political institutions.

Many arguments have been alleged in favour of such associations. It has been said, “that they are necessary to give effect to public opinion, which, in its insulated state, is incapable of counteracting abuses the most generally disapproved, or of carrying into effect what is most generally desired.” They have been represented, “as indispensable for the purpose of ascertaining public opinion, which must otherwise for ever remain in a great degree problematical.” Lastly, they have been pointed out, “as the most useful means, for generating a sound public opinion, and diffusing, in the most rapid and effectual manner, political information.”

In

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Arguments  
in their fa-  
vour.



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Answer.

In answer to these allegations, various things may be observed. That opinion will always have its weight\*; that all government is founded in opinion†; and that public institutions will fluctuate with the fluctuations of opinion, without its being necessary for that purpose that opinion should be furnished with an extraordinary organ‡; are points perhaps sufficiently established in the preceding divisions of this work. These principles amount to a sufficient answer to the two first arguments in favour of political associations: the third shall receive a more particular discussion.

Associations  
put a part  
for the  
whole:

One of the most obvious features of political association, is its tendency to make a part stand for the whole. A number of persons, sometimes greater and sometimes less, combine together. The tendency of their combination, often avowed, but always unavoidable, is to give to their opinion a weight and operation, which the opinion of unconnected individuals cannot have. A greater number, some from the urgency of their private affairs, some from a temper averse to scenes of concourse and contention, and others from a conscientious disapprobation of the measures pursued, withhold themselves from such combinations. The acrimonious, the intemperate, and the artful, will generally be found among the most forward in matters

\* Book I, Chap. V.

† Book I, Chap. VI, p. 98; Book II, Chap. III, p. 144.

‡ Book I, Chap. V; Book III, Chap. VII; Book IV, Chap. II.  
of



of this kind. The prudent, the sober, the sceptical, and the contemplative, those who have no resentments to gratify, and no selfish purposes to promote, will be overborne and lost in the progress. What justification can be advanced, for a few persons who thus, from mere impetuosity and incontinence of temper, occupy a post, the very principle of which is, the passing them for something greater and more important in the community than they are? Is the business of reform likely to be well and judiciously conducted in such hands? Add to this, that associations in favour of one set of political tenets, are likely to engender counter-associations in favour of another. Thus we should probably be involved in all the mischiefs of resistance, and all the uproar of revolution.

Political reform cannot be usefully effected, but through the medium of the discovery of political truth. But truth will never be investigated in a manner sufficiently promising, if violence and passion be not removed to a distance. To whatever property adhering to the human mind, or accident affecting it, we are to ascribe the phenomenon, certain it is that truth does not lie upon the surface. It is laborious enquiry, that has, in almost all instances, led to important discovery. If therefore we are desirous to liberate ourselves and our neighbours from the influence of prejudice, we must suffer nothing but arguments to bear sway in the discussion. The writings and the tenets which offer themselves

are attended  
with party  
spirit:



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themselves to public attention, should rest upon their own merits. No patronage, no recommendations, no list of venerable names to bribe our suffrage, no importunity to induce us, to bestow upon them our consideration, and to consider them with favour. These however are small matters. It is much worse than this, when any species of publications is patronised by political associations. The publications are then perused, not to see whether what they contain is true or false, but that the reader may learn from them how he is to think upon the subjects of which they treat. A sect is generated, and upon grounds not less irrational, than those of the worst superstition that ever infested mankind.

If we would arrive at truth, each man must be taught to enquire and think for himself. If a hundred men spontaneously engage the whole energy of their faculties upon the solution of a given question, the chance of success will be greater, than if only ten men are so employed. By the same reason, the chance will also be increased, in proportion as the intellectual operations of these men are individual, and their conclusions are suggested by the reason of the thing, uninfluenced by the force either of compulsion or sympathy. But, in political associations, the object of each man, is to identify his creed with that of his neighbour. We learn the Shibboleth of a party. We dare not leave our minds at large in the field of enquiry, lest we should arrive at some tenet disrelished by our party.



party. We have no temptation to enquire. Party has a more powerful tendency, than perhaps any other circumstance in human affairs, to render the mind quiescent and stationary. Instead of making each man an individual, which the interest of the whole requires, it resolves all understandings into one common mass, and subtracts from each the varieties, that could alone distinguish him from a brute machine. Having learned the creed of our party, we have no longer any employment for those faculties, which might lead us to detect its errors. We have arrived, in our own opinion, at the last page of the volume of truth; and all that remains, is by some means to effect the adoption of our sentiments, as the standard of right to the whole race of mankind. The indefatigable votary of justice and truth, will adhere to a mode of proceeding the opposite of this. He will mix at large among his species; he will converse with men of all orders and parties; he will fear to attach himself in his intercourse to any particular set of men, lest his thoughts should become insensibly warped, and he should make to himself a world of petty dimensions, instead of that liberal and various scene in which nature has permitted him to expatiate. In fine, from these considerations it appears, that associations, instead of promoting the growth and diffusion of truth, tend only to check its accumulation, and render its operation, as far as possible, unnatural and mischievous.



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CHAP. III.declama-  
tion :

There is another circumstance to be mentioned, strongly calculated to confirm this position. A necessary attendant upon political associations, is harangue and declamation. A majority of the members of any numerous popular society, will look to these harangues, as the school in which they are to study, in order to become the reservoirs of practical truth to the rest of mankind. But harangues and declamation, lead to passion, and not to knowledge. The memory of the hearer is crowded with pompous nothings, with images and not arguments. He is never permitted to be sober enough, to weigh things with an unshaken hand. It would be inconsistent with the art of eloquence, to strip the subject of every meretricious ornament. Instead of informing the understanding of the hearer by a slow and regular progression, the orator must beware of detail, must render every thing rapid, and from time to time work up the passions of his hearers to a tempest of applause. Truth can scarcely be acquired in crowded halls and amidst noisy debates. Where hope and fear, triumph and resentment, are perpetually afloat, the severer faculties of investigation are compelled to quit the field. Truth dwells with contemplation. We can seldom make much progress in the business of disentangling error and delusion, but in sequestered privacy, or in the tranquil interchange of sentiments that takes place between two persons.

cabal :

In every numerous association of men there will  
be



be a portion of rivalry and ambition. Those persons who stand forward in the assembly, will be anxious to increase the number of their favourers and adherents. This anxiety will necessarily engender some degree of art. It is unavoidable that, in thinking much of the public, they should not be led, by this propensity, to think much also of themselves. In the propositions they bring forward, in the subjects they discuss, in the side they espouse of these subjects, they will inevitably be biased by the consideration, of what will be most acceptable to their partisans, and popular with their hearers. There is a sort of partiality to particular men that is commendable. We ought to honour usefulness, and adhere to worth. But the partiality which is disingenuously cultivated by weakness on both sides, is not commendable. The partiality, which grows out of a mutual surrender of the understanding, where the leader first resigns the integrity of his judgment, that he may cherish and take advantage of the defects of his followers, bears an unfavourable aspect upon the common welfare. In this scene truth cannot gain; on the contrary it is forgotten, that error, a more accommodating principle, may be exhibited to advantage, and serve the personal ends of its professors.

Another feature, attendant on collections of men, meeting together for the transaction of business, is contentious dispute and long consultation about matters of the most trivial importance. Every hu-

contentious  
disputes;



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man being possessor, and ought to possess, his particular mode of seeing and judging. The business upon such occasions is to twist and distort the sense of each, so that, though they were all different at first, they may in the end be all alike. Is any proposition, letter, or declaration, to be drawn up in the name of the whole? Perhaps it is confided to one man at first, but it is amended, altered, and metamorphosed, according to the fancy of many, till at last, what once perhaps was reasonable, comes out the most inexplicable jargon. Commas are to be adjusted, and particles debated. Is this an employment for rational beings? Is this an improvement upon the simple and inartificial scene of things, when each man speaks and writes his mind, in such eloquence as his sentiments dictate, and with unfettered energy; not anxious, while he gives vent to the enthusiasm of his conceptions, lest his words should not be exactly those, in which his neighbours would equally have chosen to express themselves?

restlessness:

An appetite perpetually vexing the minds of political associators, is that of doing something, that their association may not fall into insignificance. Affairs must wait upon them, and not they wait upon affairs. They are not content to act, when some public emergence seems to require their interference, and point out to them a just mode of proceeding; they must make the emergence to satisfy the restlessness of their disposition. Thus they are ever at hand, to mar the tranquillity



tranquillity of science, and the unshackled and unobserved, progress of truth. They terrify the rest of the community from boldness of opinion, and chain them down to their prejudices, by the alarm which is excited by their turbulence of character.— It should always be remembered in these cases, that all confederate action is of the nature of government, and that consequently every argument of this work, which is calculated to display the evils of government, and to recommend the restraining it within as narrow limits as possible, is equally hostile to political associations. They have also a disadvantage peculiar to themselves, as they are an obvious usurpation upon the rights of the public, without any pretence of delegation from the community at large.

The last circumstance to be enumerated among the disadvantages of political association, is its tendency to disorder and tumult. Nothing is more notorious, than the ease with which the conviviality of a crowded feast, may degenerate into the depredations of a riot. While the sympathy of opinion catches from man to man, especially among persons whose passions have been little used to the curb of judgment, actions may be determined on, which the solitary reflection of all would have rejected. There is nothing more barbarous, bloodthirsty and unfeeling, than the triumph of a mob. It should be remembered, that the members of such associations, are ever employed in cultivating a sentiment



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CHAP. III.Utility of  
social com-  
munication.

timent peculiarly hostile to political justice, antipathy to individuals; not a benevolent love of equality, but a bitter and personal detestation of their oppressors.

But, though association, in the received sense of that term, must be granted to be an instrument of very dangerous nature, unreserved communication, especially among persons who are already awakened to the pursuit of truth, is of no less unquestionable advantage. There is at present in the world a cold reserve, that keeps man at a distance from man. There is an art, in the practice of which individuals communicate for ever, without any one telling his neighbour what estimate he forms of his attainments and character, how they ought to be employed, and how to be improved. There is a sort of domestic tactics, the object of which is to elude curiosity, and keep up the tenour of conversation, without the disclosure either of our feelings or opinions. The friend of justice will have no object more deeply at heart, than the annihilation of this duplicity. The man whose heart overflows with kindness for his species, will habituate himself to consider, in each successive occasion of social intercourse, how that occasion may be most beneficently improved. Among the topics to which he will be anxious to awaken attention, politics will occupy a principal share.

Books have by their very nature but a limited operation; though, on account of their permanence, their



their methodical disquisition, and their easiness of access, they are entitled to the foremost place. The number of those who almost wholly abstain from reading, is exceedingly great. Books, to those by whom they are read, have a sort of constitutional coldness. We review the arguments of an "insolent innovator" with fullness, and are unwilling to expand our minds to take in their force. It is with difficulty that we obtain the courage, to strike into untrodden paths, and question tenets that have been generally received. But conversation accustoms us to hear a variety of sentiments, obliges us to exercise patience and attention, and gives freedom and elasticity to our disquisitions. A thinking man, if he will recollect his intellectual history, will find, that he has derived inestimable benefit from the stimulus and surprise of colloquial suggestions; and, if he review the history of literature, will perceive, that minds of great acuteness and ability have commonly existed in a cluster.

It follows, that the promoting the best interests of mankind, eminently depends upon the freedom of social communication. Let us figure to ourselves a number of individuals, who, having stored their minds with reading and reflection, are accustomed, in candid and unreserved conversation, to compare their ideas, suggest their doubts, examine their mutual difficulties, and cultivate a perspicuous and animated manner of delivering their sentiments.



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Let us suppose, that their intercourse is not confined to the society of each other, but that they are desirous extensively to communicate the truths with which they are acquainted. Let us suppose their illustrations to be not more distinguished by impartiality and demonstrative clearness, than by the mildness of their temper, and a spirit of comprehensive benevolence. We shall then have an idea of knowledge as perpetually gaining ground, unaccompanied with peril in the means of its diffusion. Their hearers will be instigated to impart their acquisitions to still other hearers, and the circle of instruction will perpetually increase. Reason will spread, and not a brute and unintelligent sympathy.

Discussion perhaps never exists with so much vigour and utility, as in the conversation of two persons. It may be carried on with advantage in small and friendly circles. Does the fewness of their numbers imply the rarity of such discussion? Far otherwise: show to mankind, by an adequate example, the advantages of political disquisition, undebauched by political enmity and vehemence, and the beauty of the spectacle will soon render it contagious. Every man will commune with his neighbour. Every man will be eager to tell, and to hear, what the interests of all require them to know. The bolts and fortifications of the temple of truth will be removed. The craggy steep of science, which it was before difficult to ascend, will be levelled. Knowledge will be generally accessible.



cessible. Wisdom will be the inheritance of man, and none will be excluded from it but by their own heedlessness and prodigality. Truth, and above all political truth, is not hard of acquisition, but from the superciliousness of its professors. It has been slow and tedious of improvement, because the study of it has been relegated to doctors and civilians. It has produced little effect upon the practice of mankind, because it has not been allowed a plain and direct appeal to their understandings. Remove these obstacles, render it the common property, bring it into daily use, and we may reasonably promise ourselves consequences of inestimable value.

But these consequences are the property only of independent and impartial discussion. If once the unambitious and candid disquisitions of enquiring men, be swallowed up in the insatiate gulf of noisy assemblies, the opportunity of improvement is annihilated. The happy varieties of sentiment, which so eminently contribute to intellectual acuteness, are lost. A fallacious uniformity of opinion is produced, which no man espouses from conviction, but which carries all men along with a resistless tide. Truth disclaims the alliance of marshalled numbers.

The same qualifications belong to this subject, as before to the head of revolutions. Though, from what has been said, it may sufficiently appear, that association is scarcely in any case to be desired, there

Exception  
in favour of  
associations:



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there are considerations which should lead us sometimes to judge it with moderation and forbearance. There is one mode, according to which the benefit of mankind may best be promoted, and which ought always to be employed. But mankind are imperfect beings. While opinion is advancing with silent step, impatience and zeal may be expected somewhat to outrun her progress. Associations, as a measure intrinsically wrong, the wise man will endeavour to check and postpone, as much as he can. But, when the crisis arrives, he will not be induced by the irregularities of the friends of equality, to remain neutral, but will endeavour to forward her reign, as far as the nature of the case shall appear to admit. It may even happen that, in the moment of convulsion, and the terror of general anarchy, something in the nature of association may be indispensibly connected with the general safety. But, even granting this, it need not be prepared beforehand. Such preparation has a tendency to wear out the expedient. In a crisis really auspicious to public liberty, it is reasonable to believe that there will be men of character and vigour, called out on the spur of the occasion, and by the state of political knowledge in general, who will be adequate to the scenes they have to encounter. The soil in which such men are to be matured, is less that of action, than of enquiry and instruction.

Another exception.

Again ; there are two objects which association may



may propose to itself, general reform and the remedy of some pressing and momentary evil. These objects may be entitled to a different treatment. The first ought surely to proceed, with a leisurely step, and in all possible tranquillity. The second appears to require somewhat more of activity. It is the characteristic of truth, to trust much to its own energy, and to resist invasion, rather by the force of conviction, than of arms. The oppressed individual however seems particularly entitled to our assistance; and this can best be afforded by the concurrence of many. It appears reasonable that, when a man is unjustly attacked by the whole force of the party in power, he should be countenanced and protected by men, who are determined, to resist such oppressive partiality, and prevent the rights of all from being wounded through the medium of the individual, as far as that can be done consistently with peace and good order. It is probable however, that every association will degenerate, and become a mass of abuses, that is suffered to perpetuate itself, or to exist longer than is necessary, for the single and momentary purpose for which only it can justly be instituted.

It seems scarcely necessary to add in treating this subject, that the individuals who are engaged in the transactions here censured, have frequently been excited by the best intentions, and inspired with the most liberal views. It would be in the highest degree unjust, if their undertakings should be

Conclusion.



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be found of dangerous tendency, to involve the authors in indiscriminate censure for consequences they did not foresee. But, in proportion to the purity of their views, and the soundness of their principles, it were to be desired they should seriously reflect on the means they employ. It will be greatly to be lamented, if those who, so far as regards their intention, are among the truest friends to the welfare of mankind, should, by the injudiciousness of their conduct, rank themselves among its practical enemies.

## CHAP. IV.

### OF TYRANNICIDE.

*Diversity of opinions on this subject.—Argument in its vindication.—The destruction of a tyrant not a case of exception.—Consequences of tyrannicide.—Assassination described.—Importance of sincerity.*

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Diversity of  
opinions on  
this subject.

A QUESTION, connected with the mode of effecting political melioration, and which has been eagerly discussed among political reasoners, is that of tyrannicide. The moralists of antiquity contended for the lawfulness of this practice; by the moderns it has been generally condemned.



The arguments in its favour are built upon a very obvious principle. "Justice ought universally to be administered. Crimes of an inferior description are restrained, or pretended to be restrained, by the ordinary operations of jurisprudence. But criminals by whom the welfare of the whole is attacked, and who overturn the liberties of mankind, are out of the reach of this restraint. If justice be partially administered in subordinate cases, and the rich man be able to oppress the poor with impunity, it must be admitted that a few examples of this sort are insufficient to authorise the last appeal of human beings. But no man will deny that the case of the usurper and the despot is of the most atrocious nature. In this instance, all the provisions of civil policy being superseded, and justice poisoned at the source, every man is left to execute for himself the decrees of immutable equity."

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Argument  
in its vindication.

It may however be doubted, whether the destruction of a tyrant be, in any respect, a case of exception, from the rules proper to be observed upon ordinary occasions. The tyrant has indeed no particular sanctity annexed to his person, and may be killed with as little scruple as any other man, when the object is that of repelling personal assault. In all other cases, the extirpation of the offender by a self-appointed authority, does not appear to be the appropriate mode of counteracting injustice.

The destruction of a tyrant not a case of exception.

For,



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CHAP. IV.Conse-  
quences of  
tyrannicide.

For, first, either the nation, whose tyrant you would destroy, is ripe for the assertion and maintenance of its liberty, or it is not. If it be, the tyrant ought to be deposed with every appearance of publicity. Nothing can be more improper, than for an affair, interesting to the general weal, to be conducted as if it were an act of darkness and shame. It is an ill lesson we read to mankind, when a proceeding, built upon the broad basis of general justice, is permitted to shrink from public scrutiny. The pistol and the dagger may as easily be made the auxiliaries of vice, as of virtue. To proscribe all violence, and neglect no means of information and impartiality, is the most effectual security we can have, for an issue conformable to reason and truth.

If, on the other hand, the nation be not ripe for a state of freedom, the man who assumes to himself the right of interposing violence, may indeed show the fervour of his conception, and gain a certain notoriety; but he will not fail to be the author of new calamities to his country. The consequences of tyrannicide are well known. If the attempt prove abortive, it renders the tyrant ten times more bloody, ferocious and cruel than before. If it succeed, and the tyranny be restored, it produces the same effect upon his successors. In the climate of despotism some solitary virtues may spring up. But, in the midst of plots and conspiracies, there is neither truth, nor confidence, nor love, nor humanity.

Secondly,



Secondly, the true merits of the question will be still further understood, if we reflect on the nature of assassination. The mistake, which has been incurred upon this subject, is to be imputed principally to the superficial view that has been taken of it. If its advocates had followed the conspirator through all his windings, and observed his perpetual alarm, lest truth should become known, they would probably have been less indiscriminate in their applause. No action can be imagined, more directly at war with a principle of ingenuousness and candour. Like all that is most odious in the catalogue of vices, it delights in obscurity. It shrinks from the piercing light of day. It avoids all question, and hesitates and trembles before the questioner. It struggles for a tranquil gaiety, and is only complete where there is the most perfect hypocrisy. It changes the use of speech, and composes every feature the better to deceive.

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Assassina-  
tion describ-  
ed.

Between the acting of a dreadful thing  
And the first motion, all the interim \*—

is mystery and reserve. Is it possible to believe that a person who has upon him all the indications of guilt, is engaged in an action which virtue enjoins? The same duplicity follows him to the last. Imagine to yourself the conspirators kneeling at the feet of Cæsar, as they did the moment

\* Shakespeare: Julius Cæsar, Act ii.

before



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of sincerity.

before they destroyed him! not all the virtue of Brutus can save them from your indignation.

There cannot be a better instance than that of which we are treating, to prove the importance of general sincerity. We see in this example, that an action, which has been undertaken from the best motives, may, by a defect in this particular, tend to overturn the very foundations of justice and happiness. Wherever there is assassination, there is an end to all confidence among men. Protests and asseverations go for nothing. No man presumes to know his neighbour's intention. The boundaries, that have hitherto served to divide the honest man from the profligate, are gone. The true interests of mankind require, not the removal, but the confirmation of these boundaries. All morality proceeds upon mutual confidence and esteem, will grow and expand as the grounds of that confidence shall be more evident, and must inevitably decay, in proportion as they are undermined.



## CHAP. V.

## OF THE CULTIVATION OF TRUTH.

*Source of the aristocratical system.—The opposite principle stated.—Subject of this chapter—of the next.—Importance of science as conducing—to our happiness—to our virtue.—Virtue the best gift of man—proved by its undecaying excellence—by its manner of adapting itself to all situations—cannot be effectually propagated but by a cultivated mind.—Misguided virtue considered.—Importance of science to our political improvement.*

THAT we may adequately understand the power and operation of opinion in meliorating the institutions of society, it is requisite that we should consider the value and energy of truth. There is no topic more fundamental to the principles of political science, or to the reasonings of this work. It is from this point that we may most perspicuously trace the opposite tenets, of the advocates of privilege and aristocracy on the one hand, and the friends of equality, and one universal measure of justice, on the other. The partisans of both, at least the more enlightened and honourable partisans, acknowledge one common object, the welfare of the whole, of the community

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Source of  
the aristo-  
cratical sys-  
tem.



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munity and mankind. But the adherents of the old systems of government affirm, "that the imbecility of the human mind, is such as to make it unadvisable, that man should be trusted with himself; that his genuine condition is that of perpetual pupillage; that he is regulated by passions and partial views, and cannot be governed by pure reason and truth; that it is the business of a wise man not to subvert, either in himself or others, delusions which are useful, and prejudices which are salutary; and that he is the worst enemy of his species, who attempts, in whatever mode, to introduce a form of society, where no advantage is taken to restrain us from vices by illusion, from which we cannot be restrained by reason." Every man who adheres, in whole, or in part, to the tenets here enumerated, will perhaps, in proportion as he follows them into their genuine consequences, be a partisan of aristocracy.

The opposite principle stated.

Tenets the opposite of these, constitute the great outline of the present work. If there be any truth in the reasonings hitherto adduced, we are entitled to conclude that morality, the science of human happiness, the principle which binds the individual to the species, and the inducements which are calculated to persuade us to model our conduct, in the way most conducive to the advantage of all, does not rest upon imposture and delusion, but upon grounds, that discovery will never undermine, and wisdom never refute. We do not  
need



need therefore to be led to that which is fitting and reasonable, by deceitful allurements. We have no cause to fear, that the man, who shall see furthest, and judge with the most perfect penetration, will be less estimable and useful, or will find fewer charms in another's happiness and virtue, than if he were under the dominion of error. If the conduct I am required to observe be reasonable, there is no plainer or more forcible mode of persuading me to adopt it, than to exhibit it in its true colours, and show me the benefits that will really accrue from it. As long as these benefits are present to my mind, I shall have a desire, an ardour for performing the action which leads to them, to the full as great as the occasion will justify; and, if the occasion be of real magnitude, my ardour will be more genuine, and better endure the test of experiment, than it can, when combined with narrow views or visionary credulity. Truth and falsehood cannot subsist together: he that sees the merits of a case in all their clearness, cannot in that instance be the dupe either of prejudice or superstition. Nor is there any reason to believe, that sound conviction will be less permanent in its influence, than sophistry and error\*.

The value of truth will be still further illustrated, if we consider it in detail, and enquire into its effects, either abstractedly, under which form it bears the appellation of science and knowledge;

Subject of  
this chapter:

\* Book I, Chap. V; Book V, Chap. XV.



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of the next.

Importance  
of science  
as condu-  
cing :

to our hap-  
piness :

or practically, as it relates to the incidents and commerce of ordinary life, where it is known by the denomination of sincerity.

Abstractedly considered, it conduces to the happiness and virtue of the individual, as well as to the improvement of our social institutions.

In the discovery and knowledge of truth seems to be comprised, for the most part, all that an impartial and reflecting mind is accustomed to admire. No one is ignorant of the pleasures of knowledge. In human life there must be a distribution of time, and a variety of occupations. Now there is perhaps no occupation so much at our command, no pleasure of the means of which we are so little likely to be deprived, as that which is intellectual. Sublime and expansive ideas produce delicious emotions. The acquisition of truth, the perception of the regularity with which proposition flows out of proposition, and one step of science leads to another, has never failed to reward the man who engaged in this species of employment. Knowledge contributes two ways to our happiness: first by the new sources of enjoyment which it opens upon us, and next by furnishing us with a clue in the selection of all other pleasures. No well informed man can seriously doubt of the advantages with respect to happiness, of a capacious and improved intellect, over the limited conceptions of a brute. Virtuous sentiments are another source of personal pleasure,



pleasure, and that of a more exquisite kind than intellectual improvements. But virtue itself depends for its value upon the energies of intellect. If the beings we are capable of benefiting, were susceptible of nothing more than brutes are, we should have little pleasure in benefiting them, or in contemplating their happiness. But man has so many enjoyments, is capable of so high a degree of perfection, of exhibiting, socially considered, so admirable a spectacle, and of himself so truly estimating and favouring the spectacle, that, when we are engaged in promoting his benefit, we are indeed engaged in a sublime and ravishing employment. This is the case, whether our exertions are directed to the advantage of the species, or the individual. We rejoice when we save an ordinary man from destruction, more than when we save a brute, because we recollect how much more he can feel, and how much more he can do. The same principle produces a still higher degree of congratulation, in proportion as the man we save is more highly accomplished in talents and virtues.

Secondly, truth conduces to our improvement in virtue. Virtue, in its purest and most liberal sense, supposes an extensive survey of causes and their consequences, that, having struck a just balance between the benefits and injuries that adhere to human affairs, we may adopt the proceeding which leads to the greatest practicable advantage. Virtue, like every other endowment of man, admits

to our virtue.



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of degrees. He therefore must be confessed to be most virtuous, who chooses with the soundest judgment the greatest and most universal overbalance of pleasure. But, in order to choose the greatest and most excellent pleasures, he must be intimately acquainted with the nature of man, its general features and its varieties. In order to forward the object he has chosen, he must have considered the different instruments for impressing mind, and the modes of applying them, and must know the properest moment for bringing them into action. In whatever light we consider virtue, whether we place it in the act or the disposition, its degree must be intimately connected with the degree of knowledge. No man can so much as love virtue sufficiently, who has not an acute and lively perception of its beauty, and its tendency to produce the most solid and permanent happiness. What comparison can be made, between the virtue of Socrates, and that of a Hottentot or a Siberian? A humorous example how universally this truth has been perceived, may be taken from Tertullian, who, as a father of the church, was obliged to maintain the hollowness and insignificance of pagan virtues, and accordingly assures us, "that the most ignorant peasant under the Christian dispensation, possesses more real knowledge than the wisest of the ancient philosophers\*."

\* *Apologia*, Cap. xlvii. See this subject further pursued in the Appendix.

We



We shall be more fully aware of the connection between virtue and knowledge, if we consider that the highest employment of virtue is to propagate itself. Virtue alone deserves to be considered as leading to true happiness, the happiness which is most solid and durable. Sensual pleasures are momentary; they fill a very short portion of our time with enjoyment, and leave long intervals of painful vacuity. They charm principally by their novelty; by repetition they first abate of their poignancy, and at last become little less than wearisome. It is perhaps partly to be ascribed to the high estimation in which sensual pleasures are held, that old age is so early and regular in its ravages. Our taste for these pleasures necessarily declines; with our taste our activity; and with our activity gradually crumble away the cheerfulness, the energy, and the lives, of those whose dependence was placed upon these resources. Even knowledge, and the enlargement of intellect, are poor, when unmixed with sentiments of benevolence and sympathy. Emotions are scarcely ever thrilling and electrical, without something of social feeling. When the mind expands in works of taste and imagination, it will usually be found that there is something moral in the cause which gives birth to this expansion; and science and abstraction will soon become cold, unless they derive new attractions from ideas of society. In proportion therefore to the virtue of the individual, will

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Virtue the  
best gift of  
man:

proved by its  
undecaying  
excellence:



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By its man-  
ner of adapt-  
ing itself to  
all situa-  
tions :

be the permanence of his cheerfulness, and the exquisiteness of his emotions. Add to which, benevolence is a resource which is never exhausted ; but on the contrary, the more habitual are our patriotism and philanthropy, the more will they become invigorating and ardent.

It is also impossible that any situation can occur in which virtue cannot find room to expatiate. In society there is continual opportunity for its active employment. I cannot have intercourse with a human being, who may not be the better for that intercourse. If he be already just and virtuous, these qualities are improved by communication. If he be imperfect and erroneous, there must always be some prejudice I may contribute to destroy, some motive to delineate, some error to remove. If I be prejudiced and imperfect myself, it cannot however happen that my prejudices and imperfections shall be exactly coincident with his. I may therefore inform him of the truths that I know, and, even by the collision of prejudices, truth is elicited. It is impossible that I should strenuously apply myself to his improvement with sincere motives of benevolence, without some good being the result. Nor am I more at a loss in solitude. In solitude I may accumulate the materials of social benefit. No situation can be so desperate as to preclude these efforts. Voltaire, when shut up in the Bastille, and for aught he knew for life, deprived of the means either of writing or reading,

arranged



arranged and in part executed the project of his *Henriade* \*.

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All these reasonings are calculated to persuade us that the most precious boon we can bestow upon others is virtue, and that the highest employment of virtue is to propagate itself. But, as virtue is inseparably connected with knowledge in my own mind, so by knowledge only can it be imparted to others. How can the virtue we have just been contemplating be produced, but by infusing comprehensive views, and communicating energetic truths? Now that man alone is qualified to infuse these views, and communicate these truths, who is himself pervaded with them.

cannot be effectually communicated but by a cultivated mind.

Let us suppose for a moment virtuous dispositions existing without knowledge or outrunning knowledge, the last of which is certainly possible; and we shall presently find how little such virtue is worthy to be propagated. The most generous views will, in such cases, frequently lead to the most nefarious actions. A Cranmer will be incited to the burning of heretics, and a Digby contrive the Gunpowder Treason. But, to leave these extreme instances: in all cases where mistaken virtue leads to cruel and tyrannical actions, the mind will be rendered discontented and morose by the actions it perpetrates. Truth, immortal and ever present

Misguided virtue considered.

\* *Vie de Voltaire, par M \*\*\*. A Geneve, 1786. Chap. iv.* This is probably the best history of this great man which has yet appeared.

truth,



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truth, is so powerful, that, in spite of all his prejudices, the upright man will suspect himself, when he resolves upon an action that is at war with the plainest principles of morality. He will become melancholy, dissatisfied and anxious. His firmness will degenerate into obstinacy, and his justice into inexorable severity. The further he pursues his system, the more erroneous will he become. The further he pursues it, the less will he be satisfied with it. As truth is an endless source of tranquillity and delight, error will be a prolific fountain of new mistakes and discontent.

Importance  
of science to  
our political  
improve-  
ment.

As to the third point, which is most essential to the enquiry in which we are engaged, the tendency of truth to the improvement of our political institutions, there can be little room for scepticism or controversy. If politics be a science, investigation must be the means of unfolding it. If men resemble each other in more numerous and essential particulars than those in which they differ, if the best purposes that can be accomplished respecting them, be to make them free, virtuous and wise, there must be one best method of advancing these common purposes, one best mode of social existence deducible from the principles of their nature. If truth be one, there must be one code of truths on the subject of our reciprocal duties. Nor is investigation only the best mode of ascertaining the principles of political justice and happiness; it is also the best mode of introducing and establishing them.



them. Discussion is the path that leads to discovery and demonstration. Motives ferment in the minds of great bodies of men, till their modes of society experience a variation, not less memorable than the variation of their sentiments. The more familiar the mind becomes with the ideas of which these motives consist, and the propositions that express them, the more irresistibly is it propelled to a general system of proceeding in correspondence with them.

*Appendix, p. 310.*

OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN UNDERSTANDING AND VIRTUE.

*Can eminent virtue exist unconnected with talents? —*

*Nature of virtue.—It is the offspring of understanding.—It generates understanding.—Illustration from other pursuits—love—ambition—applied.*

*Can eminent talents exist unconnected with virtue? —*

*Argument in the affirmative from analogy—in the negative from the universality of moral speculation—from the nature of vice as founded in mistake.—*

*The argument balanced.—Importance of a sense of justice.—Its connection with talents.—Illiberality with which men of talents are usually treated.*



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*Appendix.*  
Can eminent virtue  
exist unconnected with  
talents?

Nature of  
virtue.

A PROPOSITION which, however evident in itself, seems never to have been considered with the attention it deserves, is that which affirms the connection between understanding and virtue. Can an honest ploughman be as virtuous as Cato? Is a man of weak intellects and narrow education, as capable of moral excellence, as the sublimest genius or the mind most stored with information and science?

To determine these questions it is necessary we should recollect the nature of virtue. Considered as a personal quality, it consists in the disposition of the mind, and may be defined a desire to promote the happiness of intelligent beings in general, the quantity of virtue being as the quantity of desire. Now desire is wholly inseparable from preference, or a perception of the excellence, real or supposed, of any object. I say real or supposed, for an object totally destitute of real and intrinsic excellence, may become an object of desire on account of the imaginary excellence that is ascribed to it. Nor is this the only mistake to which human intellect is liable. We may desire an object of absolute excellence, not for its real and genuine recommendations, but for some fictitious attractions we may impute to it. This is always in some degree the case, when a beneficial action is performed from an ill motive.

How far is this mistake compatible with real virtue? If I desire the happiness of intelligent beings,



ings, without a strong and vivid perception of what it is in which their happiness consists, can this desire be admitted for virtuous? Nothing seems more inconsistent with our ideas of virtue. A virtuous preference, is the preference of an object, for the sake of certain qualities which really belong to it. To attribute virtue to any other species of preference, would be nearly the same, as to suppose that an accidental effect of my conduct, which was out of my view at the time of adopting it, might entitle me to the appellation of virtuous.

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Hence it appears, first, that virtue consists in a desire of the happiness of the species: and, secondly, that that desire only can be eminently virtuous, which flows from a distinct perception of the value, and consequently of the nature, of the thing desired. But how extensive must be the capacity that comprehends the full value and the real ingredients of true happiness? It must begin with a collective idea of the human species. It must discriminate, among the different causes that produce a pleasurable state of mind, that which produces the most exquisite and durable pleasure. Eminent virtue requires that I should have a grand view of the tendency, of knowledge to produce happiness, and of just political institution to favour the progress of knowledge. It demands, that I should perceive in what manner social intercourse may be made conducive to virtue and felicity, and imagine the unspeakable advantages that may arise from a coincidence

It is the off-  
spring of un-  
derstanding.



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## Appendix.

cidence and succession of generous efforts. These things are necessary, not merely for the purpose of enabling me to employ my virtuous disposition in the best manner, but also of giving to that disposition a just animation and vigour. God, according to the ideas usually conceived of that being, is more benevolent than man, because he has a constant and clear perception of the nature of that end which his providence pursues.

It generates  
understand-  
ing.

A further proof, that a powerful understanding is inseparable from eminent virtue, will suggest itself, if we recollect, that earnest desire, in matters that fall within the compass of human exertion, never fails in some degree to generate capacity.

Illustration  
from other  
pursuits :

love :

This proposition has been beautifully illustrated by the poets, when they have represented the passion of love, as immediately leading, in the breast of the lover, to the attainment of many arduous accomplishments. It unlocks his tongue, and enables him to plead the cause of his passion with insinuating eloquence. It renders his conversation pleasing, and his manners graceful. Does he desire to express his feelings in the language of verse? It dictates to him the most natural and pathetic strains, and supplies him with a just and interesting language, which the man of mere reflection and science has often sought for in vain.

ambition :

No picture can be more truly founded in a knowledge of human nature than this. The history of all eminent talents is of a similar kind. Did  
Themistocles



Themistocles desire to eclipse the trophies of the battle of Marathon? The uneasiness of this desire would not let him sleep, and all his thoughts were occupied with the invention of means to accomplish the purpose he had chosen. It is a well known maxim in the forming of juvenile minds, that the instruction, which is communicated by mere constraint, makes a slow and feeble impression; but that, when once you have inspired the mind with a love for its object, the scene and the progress are entirely altered. The uneasiness of mind which earnest desire produces, doubles our intellectual activity; and as surely carries us forward with increased velocity towards our goal, as the expectation of a reward of ten thousand pounds would prompt a man to walk from London to York with firmer resolution and in a shorter time.

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Let the object be, for a person, uninstructed in the rudiments of drawing, to make a copy of some celebrated statue. At first, we will suppose, his attempt shall be mean and unsuccessful. If his desire be feeble, he will be deterred by the miscarriage of this essay. If his desire be ardent and invincible, he will return to the attack. He will derive instruction from his failure. He will examine where and why he miscarried. He will study his model with a more curious eye. He will correct his mistakes, derive encouragement from a partial success, and new incentives from miscarriage itself.

The case is similar in virtue as in science. If I  
have

*applied.*



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have conceived an earnest desire of being the benefactor of my species, I shall, no doubt, find out a channel in which for my desire to operate, and shall be quick-sighted in discovering the defects, or comparative littleness, of the plan I may have chosen. But the choice of an excellent plan for the accomplishment of an important purpose, and the exertion of a mind perpetually watchful to remove its defects, imply considerable understanding. The further I am engaged in the pursuit of this plan, the more will my capacity increase. If my mind flag and be discouraged in the pursuit, it will not be merely want of understanding, but want of desire. My desire and my virtue will be less, than those of the man, who goes on with unremitted constancy in the same career.

Can eminent talents exist unconnected with virtue?

Thus far we have only been considering how impossible it is that eminent virtue should exist in a weak understanding; and it is surprising that such a proposition should ever have been contested. It is a curious question to examine, how far the converse of this proposition is true, and in what degree eminent talents are compatible with the absence of virtue.

Argument in the affirmative from analogy:

From the arguments already adduced, it appears that virtuous desire is wholly inseparable from a strong and vivid perception of the nature and value of the object of virtue. Hence it seems most natural to conclude, that, though understanding, or strong percipient power, is the indispensable prerequisite



requisite of virtue, yet it is necessary that this power should be exercised upon this object, in order to its producing the desired effect. Thus it is in art. Without genius no man ever was a poet; but it is necessary that general capacity should have been directed to this particular channel, for poetical excellence to be the result.

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There is however some difference between the two cases. Poetry is the business of a few, virtue and vice are the affair of all men. To every intellect that exists, one or other of these qualities must properly belong. It must be granted that, where every other circumstance is equal, that man will be most virtuous, whose understanding has been most actively employed in the study of virtue. But morality has been, in a certain degree, an object of attention to all men. No person ever failed, more or less, to apply the standard of just and unjust to his own actions and those of others; and this has, of course, been generally done with most ingenuity by men of the greatest capacity.

in the negative from the universality of moral speculation :

It must further be remembered, that a vicious conduct is always the result of narrow views. A man of powerful capacity, and extensive observation, is least likely to commit the mistake, either of seeing himself as the only object of importance in the universe, or of conceiving that his own advantage may best be promoted by trampling on that of others. Liberal accomplishments are surely, in some degree, connected with liberal principles.

from the nature of vice as founded in mistake.



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ment ba-  
lanced.

He, who takes into his view a whole nation, as the subjects of his operation, or the instruments of his greatness, may be expected to entertain some kindness for the whole. He, whose mind is habitually elevated to magnificent conceptions, is not likely to sink, without strong reluctance, into those sordid pursuits, which engross so large a portion of mankind.

But, though these general maxims must be admitted for true, and would incline us to hope for a constant union between eminent talents and great virtues, there are other considerations which present a strong drawback upon so agreeable an expectation. It is sufficiently evident that morality, in some degree, enters into the reflections of all mankind. But it is equally evident, that it may enter for more or for less; and that there will be men of the highest talents, who have their attention diverted to other objects, and by whom it will be meditated upon with less earnestness, than it may sometimes be by other men, who are, in a general view, their inferiors. The human mind is in some cases so tenacious of its errors, and so ingenious in the invention of a sophistry by which they may be vindicated, as to frustrate expectations of virtue, in other respects, the best founded.

Importance  
of a sense of  
justice.

From the whole of the subject it seems to appear, that men of talents, even when they are erroneous, are not destitute of virtue, and that there is a fullness of guilt of which they are incapable. There  
is



is no ingredient that so essentially contributes to a virtuous character, as a sense of justice. Philanthropy, as contradistinguished to justice, is rather an unreflecting feeling, than a rational principle. It leads to an absurd indulgence, which is frequently more injurious, than beneficial, even to the individual it proposes to favour. It leads to a blind partiality, inflicting calamity, without remorse, upon many perhaps, in order to promote the imagined interest of a few. But justice measures by one unalterable standard the claims of all, weighs their opposite pretensions, and seeks to diffuse happiness, because happiness is the fit and proper condition of a conscious being. Wherever therefore a strong sense of justice exists, it is common and reasonable to say, that in that mind exists considerable virtue, though the individual, from an unfortunate concurrence of circumstances, may, with all his great qualities, be the instrument of a very small portion of benefit. Can great intellectual power exist, without a strong sense of justice?

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It has no doubt resulted from a train of speculation similar to this, that poetical readers have commonly remarked Milton's devil to be a being of considerable virtue. It must be admitted that his energies centered too much in personal regards. But why did he rebel against his maker? It was, as he himself informs us, because he saw no sufficient reason, for that extreme inequality of rank and

Its connection with talents.



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power, which the creator assumed. It was because prescription and precedent form no adequate ground for implicit faith. After his fall, why did he still cherish the spirit of opposition? From a persuasion that he was hardly and injuriously treated. He was not discouraged by the apparent inequality of the contest: because a sense of reason and justice was stronger in his mind, than a sense of brute force; because he had much of the feelings of an Epictetus or a Cato, and little of those of a slave. He bore his torments with fortitude, because he disdained to be subdued by despotic power. He sought revenge, because he could not think with tameness of the unexpostulating authority that assumed to dispose of him. How beneficial and illustrious might the temper from which these qualities flowed, have been found, with a small diversity of situation!

Let us descend from these imaginary existences to real history. We shall find that even Cæsar and Alexander had their virtues. There is great reason to believe that, however mistaken was their system of conduct, they imagined it reconcileable, and even conducive, to the general interest. If they had desired the general good more earnestly, they would have understood better how to promote it.

Upon the whole it appears, that great talents are great energies, and that great energies cannot flow but from a powerful sense of fitness and justice. A man of uncommon genius, is a man of high passions  
and



and lofty design; and our passions will be found, in the last analysis, to have their surest foundation in a sentiment of justice. If a man be of an aspiring and ambitious temper, it is because at present he finds himself out of his place, and wishes to be in it. Even the lover imagines, that his qualities, or his passion, give him a title superior to that of other men. If I accumulate wealth, it is because I think that the most rational plan of life cannot be secured without it; and, if I dedicate my energies to sensual pleasures, it is that I regard other pursuits as irrational and visionary. All our passions would die in the moment they were conceived, were it not for this reinforcement. A man of quick resentment, of strong feelings, and who pertinaciously resists every thing that he regards as an unjust assumption, may be considered as having in him the seeds of eminence. Nor is it easily to be conceived, that such a man should not proceed, from a sense of justice, to some degree of benevolence; as Milton's hero felt real compassion and sympathy for his partners in misfortune.

If these reasonings are to be admitted, what judgment shall we form of the decision of Johnson, who, speaking of a certain obscure translator of the odes of Pindar, says, that he was "one of the few poets to whom death needed not to be terrible \*?" Let it be remembered, that the error is by no means peculiar to Johnson, though there

Illiberality  
with which  
men of ta-  
lents are  
usually  
treated.

\* Lives of the Poets: Life of West.



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are few instances in which it is carried to a more violent extreme, than in the general tenour of the work from which this quotation is taken. It was natural to expect, that there would be a combination among the multitude to pull down intellectual eminence. Ambition is common to all men; and those who are unable to rise to distinction, are at least willing to reduce others to their own standard. No man can completely understand the character of him, with whom he has no sympathy of views; and we may be allowed to revile what we do not understand. But it is deeply to be regretted, that men of talents should so often have entered into this combination. Who does not recollect with pain the vulgar abuse that Swift has thrown upon Dryden, and the mutual jealousies and animosities of Rousseau and Voltaire, men who ought to have co-operated for the salvation of the world?

CHAP.



## CHAP. VI.

## OF SINCERITY.

*Its favourable tendencies in respect to—innocence—energy—intellectual improvement—and philanthropy. History—and effects of insincerity.—Sincerity delineated.—Character of its adherents.*

**I**T was further proposed to consider the value of truth in a practical view, as it relates to the incidents and commerce of ordinary life, under which form it is known by the denomination of sincerity.

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The powerful recommendations attendant upon sincerity are obvious. It is intimately connected with the general dissemination of innocence, energy, intellectual improvement, and philanthropy.

Its favourable tendencies in respect to

Did every man impose this law upon himself, did he regard himself as not authorised to conceal any part of his character and conduct, this circumstance alone would prevent millions of actions from being perpetrated, in which we are now induced to engage by the prospect of secrecy and impunity. We have only to suppose men obliged to consider, before they determined upon an equivocal action, whether they chose to be their own historians, the future narrators of the scene in which they were acting a

innocence :



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part, and the most ordinary imagination will instantly suggest how essential a variation would be introduced into human affairs. It has been justly observed, that the popish practice of confession is attended with some salutary effects. How much better would it be, if, instead of an institution thus equivocal, and which has been made so dangerous an instrument of ecclesiastical despotism, every man were to make the world his confessional, and the human species the keeper of his conscience?

energy :

There is a further benefit that would result to me from the habit of telling every man the truth, regardless of the dictates of worldly prudence and custom. I should acquire a clear, ingenuous and unembarrassed air. According to the established modes of society, whenever I have a circumstance to state, which would require some effort of mind and discrimination, to enable me to do it justice, and state it with the proper effect, I fly from the task, and take refuge in silence or equivocation. But the principle which forbid me concealment, would keep my mind for ever awake, and for ever warm. I should always be obliged to exert my attention, lest, in pretending to tell the truth, I should tell it in so imperfect and mangled a way, as to produce the effect of falshood. If I spoke to a man of my own faults or those of his neighbour, I should be anxious, not to suffer them to come distorted or exaggerated to his mind, or to permit what at first was fact, to degenerate into satire. If I spoke

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to



to him of the errors he had himself committed, I should carefully avoid those inconsiderate expressions, which might convert what was in itself beneficent, into offence; and my thoughts would be full of that kindness, and generous concern for his welfare, which such a task necessarily brings along with it. Sincerity would liberate my mind, and make the eulogiums I had occasion to pronounce, clear, copious and appropriate. Conversation would speedily exchange its present character of listlessness and insignificance, for a Roman boldness and fervour; and, accustomed, at first by the fortuitous operation of circumstances, to tell men of things it was useful for them to know, I should speedily learn to study their advantage, and never rest satisfied with my conduct, till I had discovered how to spend the hours I was in their company, in the way which was most rational and improving.

The effects of sincerity upon others, would be similar to its effects upon him that practised it. How great would be the benefit, if every man were sure of meeting in his neighbour the ingenuous censor, who would tell him in person, and publish to the world, his virtues, his good deeds, his meannesses and his follies? We have never a strong feeling of these in our own case, except so far as they are confirmed to us by the suffrage of our neighbours. Knowledge, such as we are able to acquire it, depends in a majority of instances, not  
upon



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upon the single efforts of the individual, but upon the consent of other human understandings sanctioning the judgment of our own. It is the uncertainty of which every man is conscious as to his solitary judgment, that produces, for the most part, zeal for proselytism, and impatience of contradiction. It is impossible I should have a true satisfaction in my dispositions and talents, or even any precise perceptions of virtue and vice, unless assisted by the concurrence of my fellows.

An impartial distribution of commendation and blame to the actions of men, would be a most powerful incentive to virtue. But this distribution, at present, scarcely in any instance exists. One man is satirised with bitterness, and the misconduct of another is treated with inordinate lenity. In speaking of our neighbours, we are perpetually under the influence of sinister and unacknowledged motives. Every thing is disfigured and distorted. The basest hypocrite passes through life with applause; and the purest character is loaded with unmerited aspersions. The benefactors of mankind, are frequently the objects of their bitterest hatred, and most unrelenting ingratitude. What encouragement then is afforded to virtue? Those who are smitten with the love of distinction, will rather seek it in external splendour, and unmeaning luxury, than in moral attainments. While those who are led to benevolent pursuits by the purest motives,



tives, yet languish under the privation of that honour and esteem, which would give new firmness to rectitude, and ardour to benevolence.

A genuine and unalterable sincerity would not fail to reverse the scene\*. Every idle or malignant tale now produces its effect, because men are unaccustomed to exercise their judgment upon the probabilities of human action, or to possess the materials of judgment. But then the rash assertions of one individual, would be corrected by the maturer information of his neighbour. Exercised in discrimination, we should be little likely to be misled. The truth would be known, the whole truth, and the unvarnished truth. This would be a trial, that the most stubborn obliquity would be found unable to withstand. If a just and impartial character were awarded to all human actions, vice would be universally deserted, and virtue every where practised. Sincerity therefore, once introduced into the manners of mankind, would necessarily bring every other virtue in its train.

Men are now feeble in their temper, because they are not accustomed to hear the truth. They build their confidence in being personally treated with artificial delicacy, and expect us to abstain from repeating what we know to their disadvantage. But is this right? It has already appeared, that plain dealing, truth, spoken with kindness, but spoken with sincerity, is the most wholesome of all

\* Vol. II, Book VI, Chap. VI.

disciplines.



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improve-  
ment:

disciplines. How then can we be justified in thus subverting the nature of things, and the system of the universe, in breeding a set of summer insects, upon which the breeze of sincerity may never blow, and the tempest of misfortune never beat?

In the third place, sincerity is, in an eminent degree, calculated to conduce to our intellectual improvement. If from timidity of disposition, or the danger that attends a disclosure, we suppress the reflections that occur to us, we shall neither add to, nor correct them. From the act of telling my thoughts, I derive encouragement to proceed. Nothing can more powerfully conduce to perspicuity, than the very attempt to arrange and express them. If they be received cordially by others, they derive from that circumstance a peculiar firmness and consistency. If they be received with opposition and distrust, I am induced to revise them. I detect their errors; or I strengthen my arguments, and add new truths to those which I had previously accumulated. It is not by the solitary anchorite, who neither speaks, nor hears, nor reads the genuine sentiments of man, that the stock of human good is eminently increased. The period of bold and unrestricted communication, is the period in which the materials of happiness ferment and germinate. What can excite me to the pursuit of discovery, if I know that I am never to communicate my discoveries? It is in the nature of things impossible, that the man, who has determin-  
ed



ed never to utter the truths he may be acquainted with, should be an intrepid and indefatigable thinker. The link which binds together the inward and the outward man, is indissoluble; and he that is not bold in speech, will never be ardent and unprejudiced in enquiry.

What is it that, at this day, enables a thousand errors to keep their station in the world; priestcraft, tests, bribery, war, cabal, and whatever else excites the disapprobation of the honest and enlightened mind? Cowardice; the timid reserve which makes men shrink from telling what they know; and the insidious policy that annexes persecution and punishment, to an unrestrained and spirited discussion of the true interests of society. Men either refrain from the publication of unpalatable opinions, because they are unwilling to make a sacrifice of their worldly prospects; or they publish them in a frigid and enigmatical spirit, stripped of their true character, and incapable of their genuine operation. If every man to-day would tell all the truth he knew, it is impossible to predict how short would be the reign of usurpation and folly.

Lastly, a still additional benefit attendant on the practice of sincerity, is good humour, kindness and benevolence. At present, men meet together with the temper, less of friends, than enemies. Every man eyes his neighbour, as if he expected to receive from him a secret wound. Every member  
of

and philan-  
thropy.



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of a polished and civilised community, goes armed. He knows many things of his associate, which he conceives himself obliged not to allude to in his hearing, but rather to put on an air of the profoundest ignorance. In the absence of the person concerned, he scarcely knows how to mention his defects, however essential the advertisement may be, lest he should incur the imputation of a calumniator. If he mention them, it is under the seal of secrecy. He speaks of them with the sentiments of a criminal, conscious that what he is saying he would be unwilling to utter before the individual concerned. Perhaps he does not fully advert to this artificial character in himself; but he at least notes it with infallible observation in his neighbour. In youth, it may be, he accommodates himself with a pliant spirit to the manners of the world; and, while he loses no jot of his gaiety, learns from it no other lessons, than those of selfishness and cheerful indifference. Observant of the game that goes forward around him, he becomes skilful in his turn to elude the curiosity of others, and smiles inwardly at the false scent he prompts them to follow. Dead to the emotions of a disinterested sympathy, he can calmly consider men as the mere neutral instruments of his enjoyments. He can preserve himself in a true equipoise between love and hatred. But this is a temporary character. The wanton wildness of youth at length subsides, and he is no longer contented to stand alone in the world.



world. Anxious for the consolations of sympathy and frankness, he remarks the defects of mankind with a different spirit. He is seized with a shuddering at the sensation of their coldness. He can no longer tolerate their subterfuges and disguises. He searches in vain for an ingenuous character, and loses patience at the eternal disappointment. The defect that he before regarded with indifference, he now considers as the consummation of vice. What wonder that, under these circumstances, moroseness, sourness and misanthropy, become the ruling sentiments of so large a portion of mankind?

How would the whole of this be reversed by the practice of sincerity? We could not be indifferent, to men whose custom it was to tell us the truth. Hatred would perish, from a failure in its principal ingredient, the duplicity and impenetrableness of human actions. No man could acquire a distant and unsympathetic temper. Reserve, deceitfulness, and an artful exhibition of ourselves, take from the human form its soul, and leave us the unanimated semblance of what man might have been; of what he would have been, were not every impulse of the mind thus stunted and destroyed. If our emotions were not checked, we should be truly friends with each other. Our character would expand: the luxury of indulging our feelings, and the exercise of uttering them, would raise us to the stature of men. I should not conceive alarm from  
my



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my neighbour, because I should be conscious that I knew his genuine sentiments. I should not harbour bad passions and unsocial propensities, because the habit of expressing my thoughts, would enable me to detect and dismiss them in the outset. Thus every man would be inured to the sentiment of love, and would find in his species objects worthy of his affection. Confidence is upon all accounts the surest foil of mutual kindness.

History

The value of sincerity will be still further illustrated, by a brief consideration of the nature of insincerity. Viewed superficially and at a distance, we are easily reconciled, and are persuaded to have recourse to it upon the most trivial occasions. Did we examine it in detail, and call to mind its genuine history, the result could not fail to be different. Its features are neither like virtue, nor compatible with virtue. The sensations it obliges us to undergo, are of the most odious nature. Its direct business, is to cut off all commerce between the heart and the tongue. There are organs however of the human frame, more difficult to be commanded, than the mere syllables and phrases we utter. We must be upon our guard, or our cheeks will be covered with a conscious blush, the awkwardness of our gestures will betray us, and our lips will falter with their unwonted task. Such is the issue of the first attempt, not merely of the liar, but of him who practises concealment, or whose object it is to mislead the person with whom he happens



happens to converse. After a series of essays we become more expert. We are not, as at first, detected by the person from whom we intended to withhold what we knew; but we fear detection. We feel uncertainty and confusion; and it is with difficulty we convince ourselves that we have escaped unsuspected. Is it thus a man ought to feel? At last perhaps we become consummate in hypocrisy, and feel the same confidence and alacrity in duplicity, that we before felt in entire frankness. Which, to an ordinary eye, would appear the man of virtue; he who, by the depth of his hypocrisy, contrived to keep his secret wholly unsuspected, or he who was precipitate enough to be thus misled, and to believe that his neighbour made use of words for the purpose of being understood?

But this is not all. It remains for the deceiver, in the next place, to maintain the delusion he has once imposed, and to take care that no unexpected occurrence shall betray him. It is upon this circumstance that the common observation is founded, "that one lie will always need a hundred others to justify and cover it." We cannot determine to keep any thing secret, without risking to be involved in artifices, quibbles, equivocations and falsehoods without number. The character of the virtuous man, seems to be that of a firm and unalterable resolution, confident in his own integrity. But the character that results from insincerity, begins in hesitation, and ends in disgrace. Let us sup-

and effects  
of insin-  
cerity.



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pose that the imposition I practised, is in danger of detection. Of course it will become my wisdom to calculate this danger, and, if it be too imminent, not to think of attempting any further disguise. But, if the secret be important, and the danger problematical, I shall probably persist. The whole extent of the danger can be known only by degrees. Suppose the person who questions me, return to the charge, and affirm that he heard the fact, as it really was, but not as I represent it, from another. What am I now to do? Am I to asperse the character of the honest reporter, and at the same time, it may be, instead of establishing the delusion, only astonish my neighbour with my cool and intrepid effrontery?

Sincerity  
delineated.

What has already been adduced, may assist us to determine the species of sincerity, which virtue prescribes, and which alone can be of great practical benefit to mankind. Sincerity may be considered as of three degrees. First, a man may conceive that he sufficiently preserves his veracity, if he never utter any thing that cannot be explained into a consistency with truth. There is a plain distinction between this man, and him who makes no scruple of the most palpable and direct falsehood. Or, secondly, it may happen that his delicacy shall not stop here, and he may resolve, not only to utter nothing that is literally untrue, but also nothing which he knows or believes will be understood by the hearer in a sense that is untrue.



true. This he may consider as amounting for the most part to an adequate discharge of his duty; and he may conceive that there is little mischief, in the frequently suppressing information which it was in his power to supply. The third and highest degree of sincerity, consists in the most perfect frankness, discards every species of concealment or reserve, and, as Cicero expresses it, “ utters nothing that is false, and withholds nothing that is true.”

The two first of these, by no means answer the genuine purposes of sincerity. The former labours under one disadvantage more than direct falsehood. It is of little consequence, to the persons with whom I communicate, that I have a subterfuge, by which I can, to my own mind, explain my deceit into a consistency with truth; while at the same time the study of such subterfuges, is more adverse to courage and energy, than a conduct which unblushingly avows the laxity of its principles. The second of the degrees enumerated, which merely proposes to itself the avoiding every active deception, seems to be measured, less by the standard of magnanimity, than of personal prudence. If, as Rousseau has asserted \*, “ the great duty of man be to do no injury to his neighbour,” then this negative sincerity may be of considerable value: but, if it be the highest and most indispensable business of man, to study and promote his neighbour’s welfare, a virtue of this sort will contribute little to so ho-

\* Emile, liv. ii.



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nourable an undertaking. If sincerity be, as we have endeavoured to demonstrate, the most powerful engine of human improvement, a scheme for restraining it within so narrow limits, cannot be entitled to considerable applause. Add to this, that it is impossible, in many cases, to suppress information, without great mastery in the arts of ambiguity and evasion, and such a perfect command of countenance, as shall prevent it from being an index to our real sentiments. Indeed the man who is frequently accustomed to seem ignorant of what he really knows, though he will escape the open disgrace of him who is detected in direct falsehood or ambiguous imposition, will yet be viewed by his neighbours with coldness and distrust, and esteemed an unfathomable and selfish character.

Hence it appears, that the only species of sincerity which can in any degree prove satisfactory to the enlightened moralist and politician, is that where the frankness is perfect, and every degree of reserve is discarded.

Character  
of its ad-  
herents.

Nor is there any danger that such a character should degenerate into ruggedness and brutality. Sincerity, upon the principles on which it is here recommended, is practised from a consciousness of its utility, and from sentiments of philanthropy. It will communicate frankness to the voice, fervour to the gesture, and kindness to the heart. Even in expostulation and censure, friendliness of intention and mildness of proceeding, may be eminently conspicuous.



spicuous. There should be no mixture of disdain and superiority. The interest of him who is corrected, not the triumph of the corrector, should be the principle of action. True sincerity will be attended with that equality which is the only sure foundation of love, and that love which gives the best finishing and lustre to a sentiment of equality.

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### *Appendix, No. I.*

#### ILLUSTRATIONS OF SINCERITY.

*Question proposed.—Erroneous maxims upon this head refuted.—General principles and theories estimated.—An injurious distinction exposed.—Limitations of sincerity.—Arguments, affirmative and negative.—Inference.—Conclusion.*

THERE is an important enquiry which cannot fail to suggest itself in this place. “ Universal sincerity has been shown to be pregnant with unspeakable advantages. The enlightened friend of the human species, cannot fail anxiously to anticipate the time, when each man shall speak truth with his neighbour. But what conduct does it behove us to observe in the interval? Are we to practise an unreserved and uniform sincerity, while the world about us acts upon so different a plan? If

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sincerity should ever become characteristic of the community in which we live, our neighbour will then be prepared to hear the truth, and to make use of the communication in a way that shall be manly, generous and just. But, at present, we shall be liable to waken the resentment of some, and to subject to a trial beyond its strength the fortitude of others. By a direct and ill-timed truth we may not only incur the forfeiture of our worldly prospects, but of our usefulness, and sometimes of our lives."

Erroneous  
maxims  
upon this  
head re-  
futed.

Ascetic and puritanical systems of morality have accustomed their votaries to give a short answer to these difficulties, by directing us "to do our duty, without regard to consequences, and uninfluenced by a consideration of what may be the conduct of others." But these maxims will not pass unexamined, with the man who considers morality as a subject of reasoning, and places its foundation in a principle of utility. "To do our duty without regard to consequences," is, upon this principle, a maxim completely absurd and self-contradictory. Morality is nothing else but a calculation of consequences, and an adoption of that mode of conduct which, upon the most comprehensive view, appears to be attended with a balance of general pleasure and happiness. Nor will the other part of the precept above stated, appear, upon examination, to be less erroneous. There are many instances, in which the selection of the conduct I should pursue, altogether depends upon a foresight of



of "what will be the conduct of others." To what purpose contribute my subscription to an object of public utility, a bridge, for example, or a canal, at a time when I certainly foreknow that the subscription will not be generally countenanced? Shall I go and complete such a portion of masonry upon the spot, as, if all my neighbours would do the same, would effect the desired purpose, though I am convinced that no one beside myself will move a finger in the undertaking? There are various regulations respecting our habits of living, expensiture, and attire, which, if generally adopted, would probably be of the highest benefit, which yet, if acted upon by a single individual, might be productive of nothing but injury. I cannot pretend to launch a ship or repel an army by myself, though either of these might be things, absolutely considered, highly proper to be done.

The duty of sincerity is one of those general principles, which reflection and experience have enjoined upon us, as conducive to the happiness of mankind. Let us enquire then into the nature and origin of general principles. Engaged, as men are, in perpetual intercourse with their neighbours, and constantly liable to be called upon without the smallest previous notice, in cases where the interest of their fellows is deeply involved, it is not possible for them, upon all occasions, to deduce, through a chain of reasoning, the judgment which should be followed. Hence the necessity of resting-

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General  
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estimated.



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places for the mind, of deductions, already stored in the memory, and prepared for application as circumstances may demand. We find this necessity equally urgent upon us in matters of science and abstraction, as in conduct and morals. Theory has also a further use. It serves as a perpetual exercise and aliment to the understanding, and renders us competent and vigorous to judge in every situation that can occur. Nothing can be more idle and shallow, than the competition which some men have set up, between theory and practice. It is true that we can never predict, from theory alone, the success of any given experiment. It is true that no theory, accurately speaking, can possibly be practical. It is the business of theory, to collect the circumstances of a certain set of cases, and arrange them. It would cease to be theory, if it did not leave out many circumstances; it collects such as are general, and leaves out such as are particular. In practice however, those circumstances inevitably arise, which are necessarily omitted in the general process: they cause the phenomenon, in various ways, to include features which were not in the prediction, and to be diversified in those that were. Yet theory is of the highest use; and those who decry it, may even be proved not to understand themselves. They do not mean that men should always act in a particular case, without illustration from any other case, for that would be to deprive us of all understanding. The moment we begin to  
compare



compare cases, and infer, we begin to theorise ; no two things in the universe were ever perfectly alike. The genuine exercise of man therefore, is to theorise, for this is, in other words, to sharpen and improve his intellect ; but not to become the slave of theory, or at any time to forget that it is, by its very nature, precluded from comprehending the whole of what claims our attention.

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To apply this to the case of morals. General principles of morality are so far valuable, as they truly delineate the means of utility, pleasure, or happiness. But every action of any human being, has its appropriate result ; and, the more closely it is examined, the more truly will that result appear. General rules and theories are not infallible. It would be preposterous to suppose that, in order to judge fairly, and conduct myself properly, I ought only to look at a thing from a certain distance, and not consider it minutely. On the contrary, I ought, as far as lies in my power, to examine every thing upon its own grounds, and decide concerning it upon its own merits. To rest in general rules, is sometimes a necessity which our imperfection imposes upon us, and sometimes the refuge of our indolence ; but the true dignity of human reason is, as much as we are able, to go beyond them, to have our faculties in act upon every occasion that occurs, and to conduct ourselves accordingly.

There is an observation necessary to be made, to prevent any erroneous application of these



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reasonings. In the morality of every action two things are to be considered, the direct, and the remote consequences with which it is attended. There are numerous modes of proceeding which might be productive of immediate pleasure, that would have so ill an effect upon the permanent state of one or many individuals, as to render them, in every rational estimate, objects, not of choice, but of aversion. This is particularly the case, in relation to that view of any action, whereby it becomes a medium, enabling the spectator to predict the nature of future actions. It is with the conduct of our fellow beings, as with the course of inanimate nature: if events did not succeed each other in a certain order, there could be neither judgment, nor wisdom, nor morality. Confidence, in the order of the seasons, and the progress of vegetation, encourages us to sow our field, in expectation of a future harvest. Confidence, in the characters of our fellow men, that they will for the most part be governed by the reason of the case, that they will neither rob, nor defraud, nor deceive us, is not less essential to the existence of civilised society. Hence arises a species of argument in favour of general rules, not hitherto mentioned. The remote consequences of an action, especially as they relate to the fulfilling, or not fulfilling, the expectation excited, depend chiefly on general circumstances, and not upon particulars; belong to the class, and not to the individual. But this makes



makes no essential alteration in what was before delivered. It will still be incumbent on us, when called into action, to estimate the nature of the particular case, that we may ascertain where the urgency of special circumstances, is such as to supersede rules that are generally obligatory.

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To return to the particular case of sincerity. Sincerity and plain dealing, are obviously, in the majority of human actions, the best policy, if we consider only the interest of the individual, and extend our calculation of that interest only over a very short period. No man will be wild enough to assert, even in this limited sense, that it is seldomer our policy to speak truth, than to lie. Sincerity and plain dealing, are eminently conducive to the interest of mankind at large, because they afford ground for that confidence and reasonable expectation, which are essential both to wisdom and virtue. Yet it may with propriety be asked, "Whether cases do not exist of peculiar emergency, where the general principle of sincerity and speaking the truth, ought to be superseded?"

Undoubtedly this is a question, to the treatment of which we should advance, with some degree of caution and delicacy. Yet it would be a strange instance of inconsistency, that should induce us, right or wrong, to recommend a universal frankness, from an apprehension of the abuses which may follow from an opposite doctrine; and thus incur a charge of deception, in the very act of persuading



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An injurious  
distinction  
exposed.

suading our neighbours that deception is in no instance to be admitted.

Some persons, from an extreme tenderness of countenancing any particle of insincerity, at the same time that they felt the difficulty of recommending the opposite practice in every imaginable case, have thought proper to allege, "that it is not the propagation of truth, but of falsehood we have to fear; and that the whole against which we are bound to be upon our guard, is the telling truth in such a manner as to produce the effects of falsehood."

This will perhaps be found upon examination to be an injudicious and mischievous distinction. In the first place, it is of great benefit to the cause of morality, that things should be called by their right names, without varnish or subterfuge. I am either to tell the simple and obvious truth, or I am not; I am to suppress, or I am not to suppress: this is the alternative upon which the present question calls us to decide. If suppression, concealment, or falsehood, can in any case be my duty, let it be known to be such; I shall at least have this advantage, I shall be aware that it can only be my duty in some extraordinary emergence. Secondly, whatever reason can be assigned for my not communicating the truth in the form in which it originally suggests itself to my mind, must, if it be a good reason, ultimately resolve itself into a reason of utility. Sincerity itself is a duty, only for reasons of utility;



utility; it seems absurd therefore, if, in any case, truth is not to be communicated in its most obvious form, to seek for the reason rather in the secondary principle of sincerity, than in the paramount and original principle of general utility. Lastly, this distinction is of a nature, that seems to deserve that we should regard it with a watchful and jealous eye, on account of its vague and indefinite application. If the question were respecting the mode of my communicating truth, there could not perhaps be a better maxim, than that I should take care so to communicate it, that it might have the effects of truth, and not of falsehood. But it will be extremely dangerous, if I accustom myself to make this the test whether I shall communicate it or no. It is a maxim that seems exactly fitted to fall in with that indolence and want of enterprise, which, in some degree or other, are characteristic of all human minds. Add to which, it is a maxim which may be applied without the possibility of limitation. There is no instance in which truth can be communicated absolutely pure. We can only make approximations to such a proceeding, without ever being able fully to arrive at it. It will be liable to some misconstruction, to some want of clearness and precision, to the exciting some passions that ought to lie for ever dormant. This maxim therefore will either prove too much, or is one to which no recourse must be had, but after such an investigation of the capacities of the human mind in each individual

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individual instance, as to make the idea of introducing a general maxim by way of compendium ridiculous.

Having cleared the subject of those ambiguities in which it has sometimes been involved, let us proceed to the investigation of the original question; and for this purpose it may be useful, to take up the subject a little higher, and recur to the basis of moral obligation.

All just reasoning in subjects of morality, has been found to depend upon this as its fundamental principle, that each man is bound to consider himself as a debtor in all his faculties, his opportunities, and his industry, to the general welfare. This is a debt which must be always paying, never discharged. Every moment of my life can be better employed, or it cannot; if it cannot, I am in that very instance, however seemingly inconsiderable, playing the part of a true patriot of human kind; if it can, I then inevitably incur some portion of delinquency. Considering the subject in this point of view, there are two articles, which will always stand among the leading principles of moral decision, the good to result from the action immediately proposed, and the advantage to the public, of my preserving in existence and vigour the means of future usefulness. Every man, sufficiently impressed with a sense of his debt to the species, will feel himself obliged to scruple the laying out his entire strength, and forfeiting his life, upon any  
single



single instance of public exertion. There is a certain proceeding which, in itself considered, I ought this day to adopt; change the circumstances, and make it unquestionable that, if adopted, my life will be the forfeit, will that make no change in my duty? This is a question which has been previously anticipated\*.

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In the mean time, to render the decision in the subject before us still more satisfactory, let us suppose a case, in which the uttering a falsehood, shall be the only means by which I can escape from a menace of instant destruction. Let it be that of a virtuous man, proscribed and hunted by the unjust usurpers of the government of his country, and who has reason to know that, if discovered, he will fall an immediate victim to their sanguinary policy. Ought he, if questioned as to who he is, by their myrmidons, to render himself the instrument of their triumph in his death, rather than affirm an untruth? Ought the man to whom he may have intrusted his secret and his life, to preserve his sincerity, at the expence of betraying his trust, and destroying his friend? Let us state the several arguments that offer themselves on both sides of this question.

Arguments,  
affirmative  
and negative.

The advantages affirmed of sincerity in general will be found equally to hold in this instance. All falsehood has a tendency to enervate the individual that practises it. With what sentiments of mind is

\* Book II, Chap. VI, p. 171; Book III, Chap. VI, p. 229.



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he to utter the falshood in question? Shall he endeavour to render it complete, and effectually to mislead the persons to whom it relates? This will require a systematical hypocrisy, and a vigilant attention lest his features and gestures should prove so many indications of what is passing in his mind. Add to this, that by such a conduct he is contributing his part to the cutting off the intercourse between men's tongues and their sentiments, infusing general distrust, and trifling with the most sacred pledge of human integrity. To assert, in a firm and resolute manner, the thing that is not, is an action from which the human mind unconquerably revolts. To avow the truth with a spirited defiance of consequences, has something in it so liberal and magnanimous, as to produce a responsive feeling in every human heart. Nor is it to be forgotten, that the threatened consequences can scarcely, in any instance, be regarded as certain. The intrepidity of his behaviour, the sobriety and dignified moderation of his carriage, and the reasonableness of his expostulations, may be such as to disarm the bitterest foe.

Let us consider the arguments on the other side of the question. And here it may be observed, that there is nothing really humiliating in the discharge of our duty. If it can be shown, that compliance, in the instance described, is that which it is incumbent to yield, then, without doubt, we ought to feel self-approbation, and not censure in the yielding



ing it. There are many duties, which the habits of the world make us feel it humiliating to discharge, as well as many vices, in which we pride ourselves; but this is the result of prejudice, and ought to be corrected. Whatever it be that our duty requires of us, the man who is sufficiently enlightened, will feel no repugnance to the performance. As to the influence of our conduct upon other men, no doubt, so far as relates to example, we ought to set an example of virtue, of real virtue, not of that which is merely specious. It will also frequently happen, in cases similar to that above described, that the memory of what we do will be entirely lost; our proceeding is addressed to prejudiced persons, who will admit no virtue in the man they hate or despise. Is it probable that the effect of my fortitude in this act of unvarying sincerity, will be more extensively beneficial to society, than all my future life, however industrious and however pure? Cases might easily have been put of private animosity, where my generous self-devotion would scarcely in any instance be heard of. No mistake can be more painful to an impartial observer, than to see an individual of great utility irretrievably thrown away upon a trivial adventure. It may also be worth remarking, that the most virtuous man that lives, is probably guilty of some acts of insincerity in every day of his life. Though therefore he ought not lightly to add to the catalogue, yet surely there is something extremely contrary to rea-



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son, in finding the same man deviating from a general rule of conduct for the most trifling and contemptible motives, and immediately after repelling an additional deviation at the expence of his life. As to the argument drawn from the uncertainty of the threatened consequences, it must be remembered, that some degree of this uncertainty adheres to all human affairs; and that all calculation of consequences, or in other words all virtue, depends upon our adopting the greater probability, and rejecting the less.

No doubt considerable sacrifices (not only of the imbecility of our character, which ought in all instances to be sacrificed without mercy, but) of the real advantages of life, ought to be made, for the sake of preserving, with ourselves and others, a confidence in our veracity. He who, being sentenced by a court of judicature for some action that he esteems laudable, is offered the remission of his sentence, provided he will recant his virtue, ought probably, in every imaginable case, to resist the proposal. Much seems to depend upon the formality and notoriety of the action. It may probably be wrong to be minutely scrupulous with a drunken bigot in a corner, who should require of me an assent to his creed with a pistol at my breast; and right peremptorily to refuse all terms of qualification, when solemnly proposed by a court of judicature in the face of a nation.

*Inference.*

If there be cases where I ought not to scruple to  
violate



violate the truth, inasmuch as the alternative consists in my certain destruction, it is at least as much incumbent on me, when the life of my neighbour is at stake. Indeed, the moment any exception is admitted to the general principle of unreserved sincerity, it becomes obviously impossible to fix the nature of all the exceptions. The rule respecting them must be, that, wherever a great and manifest evil arises from disclosing the truth, and that evil appears to be greater than the evil, to arise from violating, in this instance, the general barrier of human confidence and virtue, there the obligation of sincerity is suspended.

Nor is it a valid objection to say, “that, by such a rule, we are making every man a judge in his own case.” In the courts of morality it cannot be otherwise; a pure and just system of thinking, admits not of the existence of any infallible judge to whom we can appeal. It might indeed be further objected, “that, by this rule, men will be called upon to judge in the moment of passion and partiality, instead of being referred to the past decisions of their cooler reason.” But this also is an inconvenience inseparable from human affairs. We must and ought to keep ourselves open, to the last moment, to the influence of such considerations as may appear worthy to influence us. To teach men that they must not trust their own understandings, is not the best scheme for rendering them virtuous and consistent. On the contrary, to inure them to



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consult their understanding, is the way to render it worthy of becoming their director and guide.

Nothing which has been alleged under this head of exceptions, produces the smallest alteration in what was offered under the general discussion. All the advantages, the sublime and illustrious effects, which attend upon an ingenuous conduct, remain unimpeached. Sincerity, a generous and intrepid frankness, will still be found to occupy perhaps the first place in the catalogue of human virtues. This is the temper, that ought to pervade the whole course of our reflections and actions. It should be acted upon every day, and confirmed in us every night. There is nothing which we ought to reject with more unalterable firmness, than an action that, by its consequences, reduces us to the necessity of duplicity and concealment. No man can be eminently either respectable, or amiable, or useful, who is not distinguished for the frankness and candour of his manners. This is the grand fascination, by which we lay hold of the hearts of our neighbours, conciliate their attention, and render virtue an irresistible object of imitation. He that is not conspicuously sincere, either very little partakes of the passion of doing good, or is pitiably ignorant of the means by which the purposes of true benevolence are to be effected.

*Appendix,*



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## OF THE MODE OF EXCLUDING VISITORS.

*Its impropriety argued.—Pretended necessity of this practice, 1. to preserve us from intrusion—2. to free us from disagreeable acquaintance.*

THIS principle respecting the observation of truth in the common intercourses of life, cannot perhaps be better illustrated, than from the familiar and trivial case, as it is commonly supposed, of a master directing his servant to say he is not at home. No question of morality, can be foreign to the science of politics; nor will those few pages of the present work be found perhaps the least valuable, which, here, and in other places\*, are dedicated to the refutation of those errors in private individuals, that, by their extensive sway, have perverted the foundation of moral and political justice. Not to mention, that such speculations may afford an amusement and relief in the midst of discussions of a more comprehensive and abstracted character.

Let us then, according to the well known axiom of morality, put ourselves in the place of the man

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\* Vide Appendices to Book II, Chap. II.



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upon whom this ungracious task is imposed. Is there any of us that would be contented to perform it in person, and to say that our father or our brother was not at home, when they were really in the house? Should we not feel contaminated with the plebeian lie? Can we then be justified in requiring that from another, which we should shrink from, as an act of dishonour, in ourselves?

Whatever sophistry we may employ to excuse our proceeding, certain it is that the servant understands the lesson we teach him, to be a lie. It is accompanied by all the retinue of falsehood. Before it can be skilfully practised, he must be no mean proficient in hypocrisy. By the easy impudence with which it is uttered, he best answers the purpose of his master, or in other words the purpose of deceit. By the same means, he stifles the upbraidings of his own mind, and conceals the shame imposed on him. Before this can be sufficiently done, he must have discarded all frankness of speech, and all ingenuousness of countenance. Some visitors are so ill-bred, as not immediately to take this answer, without further examination; and some, unknown to the servant, are upon such unceremonious terms with his master, as to think themselves entitled to treat the denial with incredulous contempt. Upon either of these suppositions, the insolence and prevarication of the servant must be increased, or his confusion rendered more glaring and despicable. When he has learned this degenerate lesson upon  
one



one subject, who will undertake that it shall produce no unfavourable effects upon his general conduct?

But it is said, "This lie is necessary, and the intercourse of human society cannot be carried on without it. My friend may visit me, at a time when it would be exceedingly inconvenient to me to see him; and this practice affords a fortunate alternative, between submitting to have my occupations at the mercy of any accidental visitor on the one hand, and offending him with a rude denial on the other."

But let us ask, from what cause it is, that truth, upon the simplest occasion, should be so offensive to our delicacy, and falsehood so requisite to soothe us? He must, in reality, be the weakest of mankind, who should take umbrage at a plain answer in this case, when he was informed of the moral considerations that induced me to employ it. In fact, we are conscious of caprice in our mode of deciding respecting our visitors, and are willing to shelter our folly under this sort of irresponsibility. Would it be worthy of regret, if we compelled ourselves to part with this refuge for our imbecility, and to do nothing which we were ashamed to be known to do?

A further argument which has been urged in favour of this disingenuous practice, is, that "there is no other way by which we can free ourselves from disagreeable acquaintance." Thus it is one of

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Pretended  
necessity of  
this prac-  
tice, i. to  
preserve us  
from intru-  
sion:

2. To free  
us from dis-  
agreeable  
acquaint-  
ance.



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the perpetual effects of polished society, to persuade us, that we are incapable of doing the most trivial office for ourselves. It would be as reasonable to tell me, “that it is a matter of indispensable necessity to have a valet to put on my stockings.” If there be, in the list of our acquaintance, any person whom we particularly dislike, it usually happens that it is for some moral fault that we perceive or think we perceive in him. Why should he be kept in ignorance of our opinion respecting him, and prevented from the opportunity either of amendment or vindication? If he be too wise or too foolish, too virtuous or too vicious for us, why should he not be ingenuously told of his mistake in his intended kindness to us, rather than suffered to find it out by six months enquiry from our servant? If we practised no deceit, if we assumed no atom of cordiality and esteem we did not feel, we should be little pestered with these buzzing intruders. But one species of falshood involves us in another; and he, that pleads for these lying answers to our visitors, in reality pleads the cause of a cowardice, that dares not deny to vice the distinction and kindness that are due to virtue.



## C H A P. VII.

## OF FREE WILL AND NECESSITY.

*Second part of the present book.—Definition of necessity—Why supposed to exist in the operations of the material universe.—The case of the operations of mind is parallel.—Indications of necessity—in history—in our judgments of character—in our schemes of policy—in our ideas of moral discipline.—Objection from the fallibility of our expectations in human conduct.—Answer.—Origin and universality of the sentiment of free will.—The sentiment of necessity also universal.—The truth of this sentiment argued from the nature of volition.—Hypothesis of free will examined.—Self determination.—Indifference.—The will not a distinct faculty.—Free will disadvantageous to its possessor.—Of no service to morality.*

**T**HUS we have engaged in the discussion of various topics, respecting the mode in which improvement may most successfully be introduced into the institutions of society. We have seen, under the heads of resistance, revolution, associations and tyrannicide, that nothing is more to be deprecated than violence and a headlong zeal, that every thing

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of the pre-  
sent book.

thing may be trusted to the tranquil and wholesome progress of knowledge, and that the office of the enlightened friend of political justice, for the most part, consists in this only, a vigilant and perpetual endeavour to assist the progress. We have traced the effects which are to be produced, by the cultivation of truth, and the practice of sincerity.

It remains to turn our attention to the other branch of the subject proposed to be investigated in the present book; the mode in which, from the structure of the human mind, opinion is found to operate in modifying the conduct of individuals.

Some progress was made in the examination of this point, in an earlier division of the present work\*. An attentive enquirer will readily perceive, that no investigation can be more material, to such as would engage in a careful development of the principles of political justice. It cannot therefore be unproductive of benefit, that we should here trace into their remoter ramifications, the principles which were then delivered; as well as turn our attention to certain other considerations connected with the same topic, which we have not hitherto had occasion to discuss. Of the many controversies which have been excited relative to the operation of opinion, none are of more importance, than the question respecting free will and necessity, and the question respecting self-love and

\* Book I, Chap. V.

benevolence.



benevolence. These will occupy a principal portion of the enquiry \*.

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We will first endeavour to establish the proposition, that all the actions of men are necessary. It was impossible that this principle should not, in an indirect manner, be frequently anticipated in the preceding parts of this work. But it will be found strongly entitled to a separate consideration. The doctrine of moral necessity, includes in it consequences of the highest moment, and leads to a more bold and comprehensive view of man in society, than can possibly be entertained by him who has embraced the opposite opinion.

To the right understanding of any arguments that may be adduced under this head, it is requisite that we should have a clear idea of the meaning of the term, necessity. He who affirms that all actions are necessary, means that the man, who is acquainted with all the circumstances under which a living or intelligent being is placed upon any given occasion, is qualified to predict the conduct he will hold, with as much certainty, as he can predict any of the phenomena of inanimate nature. Upon this question the advocate of liberty in the philosophical sense, must join issue. He must, if he mean any thing, deny this certainty of

Definition  
of necessity.

\* The reader, who is indisposed to abstruse speculations, will find the other members of the treatise sufficiently connected, without an express reference to this and the three following chapters of the present book.

conjunction



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Why sup-  
posed to ex-  
ist in the  
operations  
of the mate-  
rial uni-  
verse.

conjunction between moral antecedents and consequents. Where all is constant and invariable, and the events that arise, uniformly correspond to the circumstances in which they originate, there can be no liberty.

It is generally acknowledged that, in the events of the material universe, every thing is subjected to this necessity. The tendency of investigation and enquiry, relatively to this topic of human science, has been, more effectually to exclude the appearance of irregularity, as our improvements extended. Let us recollect what is the species of evidence that has satisfied philosophers upon this point. Their only solid ground of reasoning, has been from experience. The argument which has induced mankind, to conceive of the universe as governed by certain laws, has been, an observed similarity in the succession of events. If, when we had once remarked two events succeeding each other, we had never had occasion to see that individual succession repeated; if we saw innumerable events in perpetual progression, without any apparent order, so that all our observation would not enable us, when we beheld one, to pronounce that another, of such a particular class, might be expected to follow; we should never have formed the conception of necessity, or have had an idea corresponding to that of laws and system.

Hence it follows that all that, strictly speaking, we know of the material universe, is this uniformity  
of



of events. When we see the sun constantly rise in the morning, and set at night, and have had occasion to observe this phenomenon invariably taking place through the whole period of our existence, we cannot avoid receiving this as a law of the universe, and a ground for future expectation. But we never see any principle or virtue by which one event is conjoined to, or made the antecedent of, another.

Let us take some familiar illustrations of this truth. Can it be imagined that any man, by the inspection and analysis of gunpowder, would have been enabled, previously to experience, to predict its explosion? Would he, previously to experience, have been enabled to predict, that one piece of marble, having a flat and polished surface, might with facility be protruded along another in a horizontal, but would, with considerable pertinacity, resist separation in a perpendicular direction? The simplest phenomena, of the most hourly occurrence, were originally placed at an equal distance from human sagacity.

There is a certain degree of obscurity, incident to this subject, arising from the following circumstance. All human knowledge is the result of perception. We know nothing of any substance, a supposed material body, for example, but by experience. If it were unconjoined, and bore no relation, to the phenomena of any other substance, it would be no subject of human intelligence. We



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collect a number of these concurrences, and, having, by their perceived uniformity, reduced them into classes, form a general idea annexed to that part of the subject which stands as the antecedent. It must be admitted, that a definition of any substance, that is, any thing that deserves to be called knowledge respecting it, will enable us to predict some of its future probable consequences, and that for this plain reason, that definition is prediction under another name. But, though, when we have gained the idea of impenetrability as a general phenomenon of matter, we can predict some of the variations to which it leads, there are others which we cannot predict: or, in other words, we know none of these variations but such as we have actually remarked, added to an expectation that similar events will arise under similar circumstances, proportioned to the constancy with which they have been observed to take place in our past experience. Finding, as we do by repeated experiments, that material substances have the property of resistance, and that one substance in a state of rest, when struck upon by another, passes into a state of motion, we are still in want of more particular observation, to enable us to predict the specific varieties, that will follow from this collision, in each of the bodies. Enquire of a man who knows nothing more of matter than its general property of impenetrability, what will be the result of one ball of matter impinging upon another, and you will



will soon find how little this general property can inform him of the particular laws of motion. We suppose him to know that motion will follow in to the second ball. But what quantity of motion will be communicated? What result will follow upon the collision, in the impelling ball? Will it continue to move in the same direction? Will it recoil in the opposite direction? Will it fly off obliquely; or will it subside into a state of rest? All these events will be found equally probable, by him whom a series of observations upon the past, has not instructed as to what he is to expect from the future.

From these remarks we may sufficiently collect what is the species of knowledge we possess respecting the laws of the material universe. No experiments we are able to make, no reasonings we are able to deduce, can ever instruct us in the principle of causation, or show us for what reason it is that one event has, in every instance in which it has been known to occur, been the precursor of another event of a given description. Yet this observation does not, in the slightest degree, invalidate our inference from one event to another, or affect the operations of moral prudence and expectation. The nature of the human mind is such, as to oblige us, after having seen two events perpetually conjoined, to pass, as soon as one of them occurs, to the recollection of the other: and, in cases where this transition never misleads us, but the ideal succession is always found to be an exact  
copy



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copy of the future event, it is impossible that this species of foresight should not be converted into a general foundation of inference and reasoning. We cannot take a single step upon this subject, which does not partake of the species of operation we denominate abstraction. Till we have been led to consider the rising of the sun to-morrow, as an incident of the same species as its rising to day, we cannot deduce from it similar consequences. It is the business of science to carry this task of generalisation to its furthest extent, and to reduce the diversified events of the universe to a small number of original principles.

The case of  
the opera-  
tions of  
mind is pa-  
rallel.

Let us proceed to apply these reasonings concerning matter, to the illustration of the theory of mind. Is it possible in this latter theory, as in the former subject, to discover any general principles? Can intellect be made a topic of science? Are we able to reduce the multiplied phenomena of mind to any certain standard of reasoning? If the affirmative of these questions be conceded, the inevitable consequence appears to be, that mind, as well as matter, exhibits a constant conjunction of events, and furnishes all the ground that any subject will afford, for an opinion of necessity. It is of no importance that we cannot see the ground of that necessity, or imagine how sensations, pleasurable or painful, when presented to the mind of a percipient being, are able to generate volition and animal motion; for, if there be any truth in the  
above



above statement, we are equally incapable of perceiving a ground of connection between any two events in the material universe, the common and received opinion, that we do perceive such ground of connection, being, in reality, nothing more than a vulgar prejudice.

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VII.

That mind is a topic of science, may be argued from all those branches of literature and enquiry which have mind for their subject. What species of amusement or instruction would history afford, if there were no ground of inference from moral antecedents to their consequents, if certain temptations and inducements did not, in all ages and climates, introduce a certain series of actions, if we were unable to trace a method and unity of system in men's tempers, propensities and transactions? The amusement would be inferior to that which we derive from the perusal of a chronological table, where events have no order but that of time; since, however the chronologist may neglect to mark the regularity of conjunction between successive transactions, the mind of the reader is busied in supplying that regularity from memory or imagination: but the very idea of such regularity would never have suggested itself, if we had never found the source of that idea in experience. The instruction arising from the perusal of history would be absolutely none; since instruction implies, in its very nature, the classing and generalising of objects. But, upon the supposition on which we are arguing, all ob-

Indications  
of necessity:

in history;



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CHAP.  
VII.

in our judg-  
ments of  
character :

jects would be irregular and disjunct, without the possibility of affording any grounds of reasoning or principles of science.

The idea correspondent to the term character, inevitably includes in it the assumption of necessity and system. The character of any man, is the result of a long series of impressions, communicated to his mind, and modifying it in a certain manner, so as to enable us, a number of these modifications and impressions being given, to predict his conduct. Hence arise his temper and habits, respecting which we reasonably conclude, that they will not be abruptly superseded and reversed; and that, if ever they be reversed, it will not be accidentally, but in consequence of some strong reason persuading, or some extraordinary event modifying his mind. If there were not this original and essential conjunction between motives and actions, and, which forms one particular branch of this principle, between men's past and future actions, there could be no such thing as character, or as a ground of inference, enabling us to predict what men would be, from what they have been.

in our  
schemes of  
policy :

From the same idea of regularity and conjunction, arise all the schemes of policy, in consequence of which men propose to themselves, by a certain plan of conduct, to prevail upon others to become the tools and instruments of their purposes. All the arts of courtship and flattery, of playing upon men's hopes and fears, proceed upon the supposition,



tion, that mind is subject to certain laws, and that, provided we be skilful and assiduous enough in applying the motive, the action will inevitably follow.

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VII.

Lastly, the idea of moral discipline proceeds entirely upon this principle. If I carefully persuade, exhort, and exhibit motives to another, it is because I believe that motives have a tendency to influence his conduct. If I reward or punish him, either with a view to his own improvement, or as an example to others, it is because I have been led to believe that rewards and punishments are calculated to affect the dispositions and practices of mankind.

in our ideas  
of moral dis-  
cipline.

There is but one conceivable objection, against the inference from these premises to the necessity of human actions. It may be alleged, that "though there is a real coherence between motives and actions, yet this coherence may not amount to a certainty, and, of consequence, the mind still retains an inherent activity, by which it can at pleasure supersede and dissolve it. Thus for example, when I address argument and persuasion to my neighbour, to induce him to adopt a certain species of conduct, I do it not with a certain expectation of success, and am not utterly disappointed if my efforts fail of their object. I make a reserve for a certain faculty of liberty he is supposed to possess, which may at last counteract the best digested projects."

Objection  
from the fal-  
libility of  
our expecta-  
tions in hu-  
man con-  
duct.

B b 2

But



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VII.

Answer.

But in this objection there is nothing peculiar to the case of mind. It is just so in matter. I see a part only of the premises, and therefore can pronounce only with uncertainty upon the conclusion. A philosophical experiment, which has succeeded a hundred times, may altogether fail in the next trial. But what does the philosopher conclude from this? Not that there is a liberty of choice in his retort and his materials, by which they baffle the best-formed expectations. Not that the established order of antecedents and consequents is imperfect, and that part of the consequent happens without an antecedent. But that there was some other antecedent concerned, to which at the time he failed to advert, but which a fresh investigation will probably lay open to him. When the science of the material universe was in its infancy, men were sufficiently prompt to refer events to accident and chance; but the further they have extended their enquiries and observation, the more reason they have found to conclude, that every thing takes place according to necessary and universal laws.

The case is exactly parallel with respect to mind. The politician and the philosopher, however they may speculatively entertain the opinion of free will, never think of introducing it into their scheme of accounting for events. If an incident turn out otherwise than they expected, they take it for granted, that there was some unobserved bias, some  
habit



habit of thinking, some prejudice of education, some singular association of ideas, that disappointed their prediction; and, if they be of an active and enterprising temper, they return, like the natural philosopher, to search out the secret spring of this unlooked-for event.

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The reflections into which we have entered upon the laws of the universe, not only afford a simple and impressive argument in favour of the doctrine of necessity, but suggest a very obvious reason why the doctrine opposite to this, has been, in a certain degree, the general opinion of mankind. It has appeared that the idea of uniform conjunction between events of any sort, is the lesson of experience, and the vulgar never arrive at the universal application of this principle even to the phenomena of the material universe. In the easiest and most familiar instances, such as the impinging of one ball of matter upon another and its consequences, they willingly admit the interference of chance and irregularity. In this instance however, as both the impulse and its consequences are subjects of observation to the senses, they readily imagine, that they perceive the absolute principle which causes motion to be communicated from the first ball to the second. Now the very same prejudice and precipitate conclusion, which induce them to believe that they discover the principle of motion in objects of sense, act in an opposite direction with respect to such objects as cannot be sub-

Origin and  
universality  
of the senti-  
ment of free  
will.



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CHAP.  
VII.

The senti-  
ment of ne-  
cessity also  
universal.

jected to the examination of sense. The power by which a sensation, pleasurable or painful, when presented to the mind of a percipient being, produces volition and animal motion, no one can imagine that he sees; and therefore they readily conclude that there is no uniformity of conjunction in these events.

But, if the vulgar will universally be found to be the advocates of free will, they are not less strongly, however inconsistently, impressed with the belief of the doctrine of necessity. It is a well known and a just observation, that, were it not for the existence of general laws, to which the events of the material universe always conform, man could never have been either a reasoning or a moral being. The most considerable actions of our lives are directed by foresight. It is because he foresees the regular succession of the seasons, that the farmer sows his field, and, after the expiration of a certain term, expects a crop. There would be no kindness in my administering food to the hungry, and no injustice in my thrusting a drawn sword against the bosom of my friend, if it were not the established quality of food to nourish, and of a sword to wound.

But the regularity of events in the material universe, will not of itself afford a sufficient foundation of morality and prudence. The voluntary conduct of our neighbours, enters for a share, into almost all those calculations upon which our plans  
and



and determinations are founded. If voluntary conduct, as well as material impulse, were not subjected to general laws, and a legitimate topic of prediction and foresight, the certainty of events in the material universe would be productive of little benefit. But, in reality, the mind passes from one of these topics of speculation to the other, without accurately distributing them into classes, or imagining that there is any difference in the certainty with which they are attended. Hence it appears that the most uninstructed peasant or artisan is practically a necessarian. The farmer calculates as securely upon the inclination of mankind to buy his corn when it is brought into the market, as upon the tendency of the seasons to ripen it. The labourer no more suspects that his employer will alter his mind, and not pay him his daily wages, than he suspects that his tools will refuse to perform those functions to day, in which they were yesterday employed with success \*.

Another argument in favour of the doctrine of necessity, not less clear and irresistible than that from the uniformity of conjunction of antecedents and consequents, will arise from a reference to the nature of voluntary action. The motions of the animal system distribute themselves into two great classes, voluntary and involuntary. “Vo-

The truth of this sentiment argued from the nature of volition.

\* The reader will find the substance of the above arguments in a more diffusive form, in Hume's Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, being the third part of his Essays.



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VII.

luntary action," as we formerly observed \*, "is, where the event is foreseen, previously to its occurrence, and the hope or fear of that event, forms the excitement, prompting our effort to forward or retard it."

Here then the advocates of intellectual liberty have a clear dilemma proposed to their choice. They must ascribe this freedom, this imperfect conjunction of antecedents and consequents, either to our voluntary or our involuntary actions. They have already made their determination. They are aware that to ascribe freedom to that which is involuntary, even if the assumption could be maintained, would be altogether foreign to the great subjects of moral, theological or political enquiry. Man would not be in any degree more an agent or an accountable being, though it could be proved that all his involuntary motions sprung up in a fortuitous and capricious manner.

But, on the other hand, to ascribe freedom to our voluntary actions, is an express contradiction in terms. No motion is voluntary, any further than it is accompanied with intention and design, and has for its proper antecedent, the apprehension of an end to be accomplished. So far as it flows, in any degree, from another source, it is involuntary. The new-born infant foresees nothing, therefore all his motions are involuntary. A person arrived at maturity, takes an extensive survey of the

\* Book I, Chap. V, p. 56.

consequences



consequences of his actions, therefore he is eminently a voluntary and rational being. If any part of my conduct be destitute of all foresight of the events to result, who is there that ascribes to it depravity and vice? Xerxes acted just as soberly as such a reasoner, when he caused his attendants to inflict a thousand lashes on the waves of the Hellespont.

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VII.

The truth of the doctrine of necessity will be still more evident, if we consider the absurdity of the opposite hypothesis. One of its principal ingredients is self-determination. Liberty, in an imperfect and popular sense, is ascribed to the motions of the animal system, when they result from the foresight and deliberation of the intellect, and not from external compulsion. It is in this sense that the word is commonly used in moral and political reasoning. Philosophical reasoners therefore, who have desired to vindicate the property of freedom, not only to our external motions, but to the acts of the mind, have been obliged to repeat this process. Our external actions are then said to be free, when they truly result from the determination of the mind. If our volitions, or internal acts, be also free, they must in like manner result from the determination of the mind, or in other words, "the mind in adopting them" must be "self-determined." Now nothing can be more evident, than that that in which the mind exercises its freedom, must be an act of the mind. Liberty therefore, according to this hypothesis, consists in this, that every choice

Hypothesis  
of free will  
examined.

Self-deter-  
mination.



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CHAP.  
VII.

we make, has been chosen by us, and every act of the mind, been preceded and produced by an act of the mind. This is so true, that, in reality, the ultimate act is not styled free, from any quality of its own, but because the mind, in adopting it, was self-determined, that is, because it was preceded by another act. The ultimate act resulted completely from the determination that was its precursor. It was itself necessary; and, if we would look for freedom, it must be to that preceding act. But, in that preceding act also, if the mind were free, it was self-determined, that is, this volition was chosen by a preceding volition, and, by the same reasoning, this also by another antecedent to itself. All the acts, except the first, were necessary, and followed each other, as inevitably as the links of a chain do, when the first link is drawn forward. But then neither was this first act free, unless the mind in adopting it were self-determined, that is, unless this act were chosen by a preceding act. Trace back the chain as far as you please, every act at which you arrive is necessary. That act, which gives the character of freedom to the whole, can never be discovered; and, if it could, in its own nature includes a contradiction.

Indiffer-  
ence.

Another idea which belongs to the hypothesis of free will, is, that the mind is not necessarily inclined this way or that, by the motives which are presented to it, by the clearness or obscurity with which they are apprehended, or by the temper and character



rafter which preceding habits may have generated; but that, by its inherent activity, it is equally capable of proceeding either way, and passes to its determination from a previous state of absolute indifference. Now what sort of activity is that, which is equally inclined to all kinds of actions? Let us suppose a particle of matter endowed with an inherent propensity to motion. This propensity must either be to move in one particular direction, and then it must for ever move in that direction, unless counteracted by some external impression; or it must have an equal tendency to all directions, and then the result must be a state of perpetual rest.

The absurdity of this consequence is so evident, that the advocates of intellectual liberty have endeavoured to destroy its force, by means of a distinction. "Motive," it has been said, "is indeed the occasion, the *sine qua non* of volition, but it has no inherent power to compel volition. Its influence depends upon the free and unconstrained surrender of the mind. Between opposite motives and considerations, the mind can choose as it pleases, and, by its determination, can convert the motive which is weak and insufficient in the comparison, into the strongest." But this hypothesis will be found exceedingly inadequate to the purpose for which it is produced. Not to repeat what has been already alleged to prove, that inherent power of production in an antecedent, is, in all cases, a mere fiction of the mind, it may easily be shown, that motives must  
either



either have a fixed and certain relation to their consequents, or they can have none.

For, first, it must be remembered, that the ground or reason of any event, of whatever nature it be, must be contained among the circumstances which precede that event. The mind is supposed to be in a state of previous indifference, and therefore cannot be, in itself considered, the source of the particular choice that is made. There is a motive on one side and a motive on the other: and between these lie the true ground and reason of preference. But, wherever there is tendency to preference, there may be degrees of tendency. If the degrees be equal, preference cannot follow: it is equivalent to the putting equal weights into the opposite scales of a balance. If one of them have a greater tendency to preference than the other, that which has the greatest tendency, must ultimately prevail. When two things are balanced against each other, so much amount may be conceived to be struck off from each side, as exists in the smaller sum, and the overplus that belongs to the greater, is all that truly enters into the consideration.

Add to this, secondly, that, if motive have not a necessary influence, it is altogether superfluous. The mind cannot first choose to be influenced by a motive, and afterwards submit to its operation: for in that case the preference would belong wholly to this previous volition. The determination would  
in



in reality be complete in the first instance; and the motive, which came in afterwards, might be the pretext, but could not be the true source of the proceeding\*.

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VII.

The will not  
a distinct fa-  
culty.

Lastly, it may be observed upon the hypothesis of free will, that the whole system is built upon a distinction where there is no difference, to wit, a distinction between the intellectual and active powers of the mind. A mysterious philosophy taught men to suppose, that, when an object was already felt to be desirable, there was need of some distinct power to put the body in motion. But reason finds no ground for this supposition; nor is it possible to conceive (in the case of an intellectual faculty placed in an aptly organised body, where preference exists, together with a sentiment, the dictate of experience, of our power to obtain the object preferred) of any thing beyond this, that can contribute to render a certain motion of the animal frame the necessary result. We need only attend to the obvious meaning of the terms, in order to perceive that the will is merely, as it has been happily termed, “the last act of the understanding †,” “one of the different cases of the association of ideas ‡.” What indeed is preference, but a feeling of something that really inheres, or

\* The argument from the impossibility of free will is treated with great force of reasoning in Jonathan Edwards's Enquiry into the Freedom of the Will.

† Clarke.

‡ Hartley.



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VII.

is supposed to inhere, in the objects themselves? It is the comparison, true or erroneous, which the mind makes, respecting such things as are brought into competition with each other. This is indeed the same principle as was established upon a former occasion, when we undertook to prove that the voluntary actions of men originate in their opinions\*. But, if this fact had been sufficiently attended to, the freedom of the will would never have been gravely maintained by philosophical writers; since no man ever imagined, that we were free to feel or not to feel an impression made upon our organs, and to believe or not to believe a proposition demonstrated to our understanding.

Free will  
disadvanta-  
geous to its  
possessor:

It must be unnecessary to add any thing further on this head, unless it be a momentary recollection of the sort of benefit that freedom of the will would confer upon us, supposing it possible. Man being, as we have here found him to be, a creature, whose actions flow from the simplest principle, and who is governed by the apprehensions of his understanding, nothing further is requisite but the improvement of his reasoning faculty, to make him virtuous and happy. But did he possess a faculty independent of the understanding, and capable of resisting from mere caprice the most powerful arguments, the best education and the most sedulous instruction might be of no use to him. This freedom we shall easily perceive to be his bane and his

\* Book I, Chap. V.

curse;



curse; and the only hope of lasting benefit to the species, would be, by drawing closer the connection between the external motions and the understanding, wholly to extirpate it. The virtuous man, in proportion to his improvement, will be under the constant influence of fixed and invariable principles; and such a being as we conceive God to be, can never in any one instance have exercised this liberty, that is, can never have acted in a foolish and tyrannical manner. Freedom of the will is absurdly represented as necessary to render the mind susceptible of moral principles; but in reality, so far as we act with liberty, so far as we are independent of motives, our conduct is as independent of morality as it is of reason, nor is it possible that we should deserve either praise or blame for a proceeding thus capricious and indisciplinable.

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CHAP.  
VII.

of no service  
to morality.



## CHAP. VIII.

INFERENCES FROM THE DOCTRINE OF  
NECESSITY.

*Idea it suggests to us of the universe.—Influence on our moral ideas :—action—virtue—exertion—persuasion—exhortation—ardour—complacency and aversion—punishment—repentance—praise and blame—intellectual tranquillity.—Language of necessity recommended.*

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VIII.

Idea it suggests to us of the universe.

CONSIDERING then the doctrine of moral necessity as sufficiently established, let us proceed to the consequences that are to be deduced from it. This view of things presents us with an idea of the universe, as of a body of events in systematical arrangement, nothing in the boundless progress of things interrupting this system, or breaking in upon the experienced succession of antecedents and consequents. In the life of every human being there is a chain of events, generated in the lapse of ages which preceded his birth, and going on in regular procession through the whole period of his existence, in consequence of which it was impossible for him to act in any instance otherwise than he has acted.

Influence on our moral ideas :

The contrary of this having been the conception of the mass of mankind in all ages, and the ideas of contingency



contingency and accident having perpetually obtruded themselves, the established language of morality has been universally tinged with this error. It will therefore be of no trivial importance, to enquire, how much of this language is founded in the truth of things, and how much of what is expressed by it, is purely imaginary. Accuracy of language is the indispensable prerequisite of sound knowledge; and, without attention to that subject, we can never ascertain the extent and importance of the consequences of necessity.

First then it appears, that, in the emphatical and refined sense in which the word has sometimes been used, there is no such thing as action. Man is in no case, strictly speaking, the beginner of any event or series of events that takes place in the universe, but only the vehicle through which certain antecedents operate, which antecedents, if he were supposed not to exist, would cease to have that operation. Action however, in its more simple and obvious sense, is sufficiently real, and exists equally both in mind and in matter. When a ball upon a billiard-board is struck by the mace, and afterwards impinges upon a second ball, the ball which was first in motion, is said to act upon the second, though the results are in the strictest conformity to the impression received, and the motion it communicates is precisely determined by the circumstances of the case. Exactly similar to this, upon the reasonings already delivered, are the actions of

action :



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VIII.

the human mind. Mind is a real principle, an indispensable link in the great chain of the universe; but not, as has sometimes been supposed, a principle of that paramount description, as to supersede all necessities, and be itself subject to no laws and methods of operation.

virtue :

Is this view of things incompatible with the existence of virtue?

If by virtue we understand, the operation of an intelligent being in the exercise of an optional power, so that, under the same precise circumstances, it might or might not have taken place, undoubtedly it will annihilate it.

But the doctrine of necessity does not overturn the nature of things. Happiness and misery, wisdom and error will still be distinct from each other, and there will still be a correspondence between them. Wherever there is that which may be the means of pleasure or pain to a sensitive being, there is ground for preference and desire, or on the contrary for neglect and aversion. Benevolence and wisdom will be objects worthy to be desired, selfishness and error worthy to be disliked. If therefore by virtue we mean, that principle which asserts the preference of the former over the latter, its reality will remain undiminished by the doctrine of necessity.

Virtue, if we would reason accurately, should perhaps be considered by us, in the first instance, objectively, rather than as modifying any particular beings.



beings \*. Virtuous conduct, is conduct proposing to itself a certain end ; by its tendency to answer that end, its value and purity are to be tried. Its purpose is the production of happiness, and the aptitude or inaptitude of particular beings in this respect, will decide their importance in the scale of existence. This aptitude is usually termed capacity or power. Now power, in the sense of the hypothesis of liberty, is altogether chimerical. But power, in the sense in which it is sometimes affirmed of inanimate substances, is equally true of those which are animate. A candlestick has the power or capacity of retaining a candle in a perpendicular direction. A knife has a capacity of cutting. In the same manner a human being has a capacity of walking : though it may be no more true of him, than of the inanimate substance, that he has an option to exercise or not to exercise that capacity. Again, there are different degrees as well as different classes of capacity. One knife is better adapted for the purposes of cutting than another.

There are two considerations relative to any particular being, that generate approbation, and this whether the being be possessed of consciousness or no. These considerations are, capacity, and the application of capacity. We approve of a sharp knife rather than a blunt one, because its capacity is greater. We approve of its being employed in carving food, rather than in maiming men or other

\* Book II, Chap. IV.



animals, because that application of its capacity is preferable. But all approbation or preference is relative to utility or general good. A knife is as capable as a man, of being employed in purposes of utility ; and the one is no more free than the other as to its employment. The mode in which a knife is made subservient to these purposes, is by material impulse. The mode in which a man is made subservient, is by inducement and persuasion. But both are equally the affair of necessity. The man differs from the knife, as the iron candlestick differs from the brass one ; he has one more way of being acted upon. This additional way in man, is motive ; in the candlestick, is magnetism.

Virtue is a term which has been appropriated to describe the effects produced by men, under the influence of motives, in promoting the general good : it describes the application of sentient and human capacity, and not the application of capacity in inanimate substances. The word, thus explained, is to be considered as rather similar to grammatical distinction, than to real and philosophical difference. Thus, in Latin, *bonus* is *good* as affirmed of a man, *bona* is *good* as affirmed of a woman. In the same manner we can as easily conceive of the capacity of an inanimate, as of an animate, substance being applied to the general good ; and as accurately describe the best possible application of the one, as of the other. The end, that upon which the application depends for its value, is the same in both instances.



stances. But we call the latter virtue and duty, and not the former. These words may, in a popular sense, be considered as either masculine or feminine, but never neuter. The existence of virtue therefore, if by this term we mean the real and essential difference between virtue and vice, the importance of a virtuous character, and the approbation that is due to it, is not annihilated by the doctrine of necessity, but rather illustrated and confirmed.

But, if the doctrine of necessity do not annihilate virtue, it tends to introduce a great change into our ideas respecting it. According to this doctrine it will be absurd for a man to say, "I will exert myself," "I will take care to remember," or even "I will do this." All these expressions imply as if man were, or could be, something else than what motives make him. Man is in reality a passive, and not an active being. In another sense however he is sufficiently capable of exertion. The operations of his mind may be laborious, like those of the wheel of a heavy machine in ascending a hill, may even tend to wear out the substance of the shell in which it acts, without in the smallest degree impeaching its passive character. If we were constantly aware of this, our minds would not glow less ardently with the love of truth, justice, happiness and mankind. We should have a firmness and simplicity in our conduct, not wasting itself in fruitless struggles and regrets, not hurried along

exertion :



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with infantine impatience, but seeing actions with their consequences, and calmly and unreservedly given up to the influence of those comprehensive views which this doctrine inspires.

persuasion :

As to our conduct towards others, in instances where we were concerned to improve and meliorate their minds, we should address our representations and remonstrances to them with double confidence. The believer in free-will, can expostulate, with or correct, his pupil, with faint and uncertain hopes, conscious that the clearest exhibition of truth is impotent, when brought into contest with the unhearing and indisciplinable faculty of will ; or in reality, if he were consistent, secure that it could produce no effect. The necessarian on the contrary employs real antecedents, and has a right to expect real effects.

exhortation:

But, though he would represent, he would not exhort, for this is a term without a meaning. He would suggest motives to the mind, but he would not call upon it to comply, as if it had a power to comply, or not to comply. His office would consist of two parts, the exhibition of motives to the pursuit of a certain end, and the delineation of the easiest and most effectual way of attaining that end.

There is no better scheme, for enabling us to perceive, how far any idea that has been connected with the hypothesis of liberty, has a real foundation, than to translate the usual mode of expressing it, into the language of necessity. Suppose the idea of ex-

hortation,



hortation, so translated, to stand thus: "To enable any arguments I may suggest to you, to make a suitable impression, it is necessary that they should be fairly considered. I proceed therefore to evince to you the importance of attention, knowing, that, if I can make this importance sufficiently manifest, attention will inevitably follow." I should surely be far better employed, in enforcing directly the truth I am desirous to impress, than in having recourse to this circuitous mode, of treating attention as if it were a separate faculty. Attention will, in reality, always be proportionate to our apprehension of the importance of the subject proposed.

At first sight it may appear as if, the moment I was satisfied that exertion on my part was no better than a fiction, and that I was the passive instrument of causes exterior to myself, I should become indifferent to the objects which had hitherto interested me the most deeply, and lose all that inflexible perseverance, which seems inseparable from great undertakings. But this cannot be the true state of the case. The more I resign myself to the influence of truth, the clearer will be my perception of it. The less I am interrupted by questions of liberty and caprice, of attention and indolence, the more uniform will be my constancy. Nothing could be more unreasonable, than that the sentiment of necessity should produce in me a spirit of neutrality and indifference. The more certain is the

ardour ;



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complacence  
and aver-  
sion:

conjunction between antecedents and consequents, the more chearfulness should I feel in yielding to painful and laborious employments.

It is common for men impressed with the opinion of free will, to entertain resentment, indignation, and anger, against those who fall into the commission of vice. How much of these feelings is just, and how much erroneous? The difference between virtue and vice, will equally remain upon the opposite hypothesis. Vice therefore must be an object of rejection, and virtue of preference; the one must be approved, and the other disapproved. But our disapprobation of vice, will be of the same nature, as our disapprobation of an infectious distemper.

One of the reasons why we are accustomed to regard the murderer with more acute feelings of displeasure, than the knife he employs, is that we find a more dangerous property, and greater cause for apprehension, in the one than in the other. The knife is only accidentally an object of terror, but against the murderer we can never be enough upon our guard. In the same manner we regard the middle of a busy street with less complacency, as a place for walking, than the side; and the ridge of a house with more aversion than either. Independently therefore of the idea of freedom, mankind in general will find in the enormously vicious a sufficient motive of apprehension and displeasure.

With



With the addition of that idea, it is no wonder that they should be prompted to sentiments of the most intemperate abhorrence.

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VIII.

These sentiments obviously lead, to the examination of the prevailing conceptions on the subject of punishment. The doctrine of necessity, would teach us to class punishment in the list of the means we possess of influencing the human mind, and may induce us to enquire into its utility, as an instrument for reforming error. The more the human mind can be shown to be under the influence of motive, the more certain it is that punishment will produce a great and unequivocal effect. But the doctrine of necessity will teach us to look upon punishment with no complacence, and at all times to prefer the most direct means of encountering error, the development of truth. Whenever punishment is employed under this system, it will be employed, not for any intrinsic recommendation it possesses, but only as it shall appear to conduce to general utility.

punishment:

On the contrary it is usually imagined, that, independently of the supposed utility of punishment, there is proper desert in the criminal, a certain fitness in the nature of things that renders pain the suitable concomitant of vice. It is therefore frequently said, that it is not enough that a murderer should be transported to a desert island, where there should be no danger that his malignant propensities should ever again have opportunity to act; but that



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that it is also right the indignation of mankind against him, should express itself, in the infliction of some actual ignominy and pain. On the contrary, under the system of necessity, the terms, guilt, crime, desert and accountableness, in the abstract and general sense in which they have sometimes been applied, have no place.

repentance :

Correlative to the feelings of resentment, indignation and anger against the offences of others, are those of repentance, contrition and sorrow for our own. As long as we admit of an essential difference between virtue and vice, no doubt all erroneous conduct, whether of ourselves or others, will be regarded with disapprobation. But it will in both cases be considered, under the system of necessity, as a link in the great chain of events, which could not have been otherwise than it is. We shall therefore no more be disposed to repent of our own faults, than of the faults of others. It will be proper to view them both, as actions injurious to the public good, and the repetition of which is to be deprecated. Amidst our present imperfections, it will perhaps be useful to recollect what is the error by which we are most easily seduced. But, in proportion as our views extend, we shall find motives sufficient to the practice of virtue, without a partial retrospect to ourselves, or a recollection of our own propensities and habits.

praise and  
blame :

In the ideas annexed to the words resentment and repentance, there is some mixture of true judgment  
and



and a sound conception of the nature of things. There is perhaps still more justice, in the notions conveyed by praise and blame, though these also have been vitiated and distorted by the hypothesis of liberty. When I speak of a beautiful landscape or an agreeable sensation, I employ the language of panegyric. I employ it still more emphatically, when I speak of a good action; because I am conscious, that the panegyric to which it is entitled, has a tendency to procure a repetition of such actions. So far as praise implies nothing more than this, it perfectly accords with the severest philosophy. So far as it implies, that the man could have abstained from the virtuous action I applaud, it belongs only to the delusive system of liberty.

A further consequence of the doctrine of necessity, is its tendency to make us survey all events with a tranquil and placid temper, and approve and disapprove without impeachment to our self-possession. It is true, that events may be contingent, as to any knowledge we possess respecting them, however certain they are in themselves. Thus the advocate of liberty, knows that his relation was either lost or saved in the great storm that happened two months ago; he regards this event as past and certain, and yet he does not fail to be anxious about it. But it is not less true, that anxiety and perturbation for the most part include in them, an imperfect sense of contingency, and a feeling as if our efforts could make some alteration in the event.

intellectual  
tranquillity,

When



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When the person recollects with clearness that the event is over, his mind grows composed; but presently he feels as if it were in the power of God or man to alter it, and his agitation is renewed. To this may be further added the impatience of curiosity; but philosophy and reason have an evident tendency to prevent useless curiosity from disturbing our peace. He therefore who regards all things past, present, and to come, as links of an indissoluble chain, will, as often as he recollects this comprehensive view, find himself assisted to surmount the tumult of passion; and be enabled to reflect upon the moral concerns of mankind with the same clearness of perception, the same firmness of judgment, and the same constancy of temper, as we are accustomed to do upon the truths of geometry.

This however must be expected to be no more than a temporary exertion. A sound philosophy may afford us intervals of entire tranquillity. It will communicate a portion of this tranquillity to the whole of our character. But the essence of the human mind will still remain. Man is the creature of habit; and it is impossible for him to lose those things which afforded him a series of pleasurable sensations, without finding his thoughts in some degree unhinged, and being obliged, under the pressure of considerable disadvantages, to seek, in paths untried, and in new associations, a substitute for the benefits of which he has been deprived.

It



It would be of infinite importance to the cause of science and virtue, to express ourselves upon all occasions in the language of necessity. The contrary language is perpetually intruding, and it is difficult to speak two sentences, upon any topic connected with human action, without it. The expressions of both hypotheses are mixed in inextricable confusion, just as the belief of both hypotheses, however incompatible, will be found to exist in all uninstructed minds. The reformation of which I speak, will probably be found exceedingly practicable in itself; though, such is the subtlety of error, that we should, at first, find several revivals and much laborious study necessary, before it could be perfectly weeded out. This must be the author's apology, for not having attempted in the present work, what he recommends to others.

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Language of  
necessity re-  
commended.



## CHAP. IX.

## OF THE MECHANISM OF THE HUMAN MIND.

*Nature of mechanism.—Its classes, material and intellectual.—Material system, or of vibrations.—The intellectual system most probable—from the consideration that thought would otherwise be a superfluity—from the established principles of reasoning from effects to causes.—Objections refuted.—Thoughts which produce animal motion may be—1. involuntary—2. unattended with consciousness.—The mind cannot have more than one thought at any one time.—Objection to this assertion from the case of complex ideas—from various mental operations—as comparison—apprehension.—Rapidity of the succession of ideas.—Application.—Duration measured by consciousness.—3. a distinct thought to each motion may be unnecessary—apparent from the complexity of sensible impressions.—The mind always thinks.—Conclusion.—The theory applied to the phenomenon of walking—to the circulation of the blood.—Of motion in general.—Of dreams.*

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Nature of  
mechanism.

THE doctrine of necessity being admitted, it follows that the theory of the human mind is properly, like the theory of every other series of events with which we are acquainted, a system of mechanism; understanding by mechanism nothing



thing more, than a regular succession of phenomena, without any uncertainty of event, so that every consequent requires a specific antecedent, and could be no otherwise in any respect than as the antecedent determined it to be.

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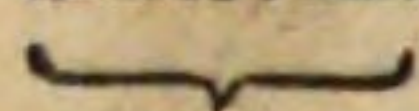
But there are two sorts of mechanism capable of being applied to the solution of this case, one which has for its medium only matter and motion, the other which has for its medium thought. Which of these is to be regarded as most probable?

Its classes,  
material and  
intellectual.

Material  
system, or of  
vibrations.

According to the first, we may conceive the human body to be so constituted, as to be susceptible of vibrations, in the same manner as the strings of a musical instrument. These vibrations, having begun upon the surface of the body, are conveyed to the brain; and, in a manner that is equally the result of construction, produce a second set of vibrations beginning in the brain, and conveyed to the different organs or members of the body. Thus it may be supposed, that a piece of iron considerably heated is applied to the body of an infant, and that the report of this irritation and separation of parts being conveyed to the brain, vents itself again in a shrill and piercing cry. It is in this manner that certain convulsive and spasmodic affections appear to take place in the body. The case, as here described, is similar to that of the bag of a pair of bagpipes, which, being pressed in a certain manner, utters a groan, without any thing more being necessary to account for this phenomenon, than the known laws of matter and motion. Let us add to these



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these vibrations a system of associations to be carried on by traces to be made upon the medullary substance of the brain, by means of which past and present impressions are connected according to certain laws, as the traces happen to approach or run into each other; and we have then a complete scheme of a certain sort, of the phenomena of human action. It is to be observed that, according to this system, mind, or perception, is altogether unnecessary to explain the appearances. It might for other reasons be desirable or wise, in the author of the universe for example, to introduce a thinking substance, or a power of perception, as a spectator of the process. But this percipient power is altogether neutral, having apparently no concern, either as a medium or otherwise, in the events to be produced\*.

The intellectual system most probable:

The second system, which represents thought as the medium of operation, is not less a system of mechanism according to the doctrine of necessity, but it is a mechanism of a totally different kind.

\* The above will be found to be a tolerably accurate description of the hypothesis of the celebrated Hartley. It was unnecessary to quote his words, as it would be foreign to the purpose of the present work to enter into a refutation of any individual writer. The sagacity of Hartley, in having arranged and analysed the phenomena of mind, and shown the practicability of reducing its different operations to a simple principle, cannot be too highly applauded. The reasonings of the present chapter, if just, may be considered as giving farther stability to his principal doctrine, by freeing it from the scheme of material automatism with which it was unnecessarily clogged.

There



There are various reasons calculated to persuade us that this last hypothesis is the most probable. No inconsiderable argument may be derived, from the singular and important nature of that property of human beings, which we term thought ; which it is surely somewhat violent to strike out of our system, as a mere superfluity.

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from the consideration that thought would otherwise be a superfluity :

A second reason still more decisive than the former, arises from the constancy with which thought, in innumerable instances, accompanies the functions of this mechanism. Now this constancy of conjunction, has been shown to be the only ground we have, in any imaginable subject, for proceeding from antecedent to consequent, and expecting, when we see one given event, that another event of a given sort will succeed it \*. We cannot therefore reject the principle which supposes thought to be a real medium in the mechanism of man, but upon grounds that would vitiate our reasonings in every topic of human enquiry.

from the established principles of reasoning from effects to causes.

It may be objected, “ that, though this regularity of event is the only rational principle of inference, yet thought may be found not to possess the character of a medium, motion being in all instances the antecedent, and thought never any thing more than a consequent.” But this is contrary to every thing we know of the system of the universe, in which each event appears to be alternately both the one and the other, nothing terminating in itself, but

Objections refuted.

\* Chap. VII.



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every thing leading on to an endless chain of consequences.

It would be equally vain to object, "that we are unable to conceive how thought can have any tendency to produce motion in the animal system;" since it has just appeared that this ignorance is by no means peculiar to the subject before us. We are universally unable to perceive a foundation of necessary connection \*.

Thoughts  
which pro-  
duce animal  
motion may  
be,

It being then sufficiently clear that there are cogent reasons to persuade us, that thought is the medium through which the motions of the animal system are generally carried on, let us proceed to consider what is the nature of those thoughts by which the limbs and organs of our body are set in motion. It will then probably be found, that the difficulties which have clogged the intellectual hypothesis, are principally founded in erroneous notions derived from the system of liberty; as if there were any essential difference, between those thoughts which are the medium of generating motion, and thoughts in general.

1. involun-  
tary.

First, thought may be the source of animal motion, without partaking, in any degree, of volition, or design. It is certain that there is a great variety of motions in the animal system, which are, in every view of the subject, involuntary †. Such, for example, are the cries of an infant, when it is first impressed with the sensation of pain. In the first motions of the animal system, nothing of any sort

\* Chap. VII.

† Book I, Chap. V.

could



could possibly be foreseen, and therefore nothing of any sort could be intended. Yet these motions have sensation or thought for their constant concomitant; and therefore all the arguments which have been already alleged, remain in full force, to prove that thought is the medium of their production.

Nor will this appear extraordinary, if we consider the nature of volition itself. In volition, if the doctrine of necessity be true, the mind is altogether passive. Two ideas present themselves in some way connected with each other; and a perception of preferableness necessarily follows. An object having certain desirable qualities, is perceived to be within my reach; and my hand is necessarily stretched out with an intention to obtain it. If a perception of preference, or desirableness, irresistibly lead to animal motion, why may not the mere perception of pain? All that the adversary of automatism is concerned to maintain is, that thought is an essential link in the chain; and that, the moment it is taken away, the links that were before, no longer afford the slightest ground to expect motion in the links that were after.—It is possible that, as a numerous class of motions have their constant origin in thought, so there may be no thoughts altogether unattended with motion.

Secondly, thought may be the source of animal motion, and at the same time be unattended with consciousness. This is undoubtedly a distinction of considerable refinement, depending upon the precise meaning of words; and, if any person should choose to express himself differently on the subject, it would

2. unattended with consciousness.



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be useless obstinately to dispute that difference with him. By the consciousness which accompanies any thought, there seems to be something implied distinct from the thought itself. Consciousness is a sort of supplementary reflection, by which the mind not only has the thought, but adverts to its own situation, and observes that it has it. Consciousness therefore, however nice the distinction, seems to be a second thought.

The mind cannot have more than one thought at any one time.

In order to ascertain whether every thought be attended with consciousness, it may be proper to consider whether the mind can ever have more than one thought at any one time. Now this seems altogether contrary to the very nature of mind. My present thought, is that to which my present attention is yielded; but I cannot attend to several things at once. This assertion appears to be of the nature of an intuitive axiom; and experience is perpetually reminding us of its truth. In comparing two objects, we frequently endeavour, as it were, to draw them together in the mind, but we seem obliged to pass successively from the one to the other.

But, though it be intuitively true, that we can attend to but one thing, or, in other words, have but one thought, at one time, and though intuitive and self-evident propositions do not, properly speaking, admit of being supported by argument, yet there is a collateral consideration, something in the nature of an argument, that may be adduced in support of this proposition. It is at present generally admitted, by all accurate reasoners upon the nature of the human mind,



mind, that its whole internal history may be traced to one single principle, association. There are but two ways in which a thought can be excited in the mind, first, by external impression, secondly, by the property, which one thought existing in the mind, is found to have, of introducing a second thought through the means of some link of connection between them. This being premised, let us suppose a given mind to have two ideas at the same time. There can be no reason why either of these ideas should prove ungenerative, or why the two ideas they are best fitted to bring after them, should not co-exist, as well as their predecessors. Let the same process be repeated indefinitely. We have then two trains of thinking exactly contemporary in the same mind. Very curious questions will here arise. Have they any communication? Do they flow separately, or occasionally cross and interrupt each other? Can any reason be given, why one of them should not relate to the doctrine of fluxions, and the other to the drama? in other words, why the same man should not, at the same time, be both Newton and Shakspeare? Why may not one of these coexisting trains be of a joyful, and the other of a sorrowful tenour? There is no absurdity that may not be supported upon the assumption of this principle. In fact we have no other conception of identity, as it relates to the human mind, than that of a single idea, supersedeable by external impression, or regularly leading on, by means of various connections, to an indefinite train of ideas in uninterrupted succession.



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Objection to  
this assertion  
from the case  
of complex  
ideas :

But this principle, though apparently supported both by reason and intuition, is not unattended with difficulties. The first is that which arises from the case of complex ideas. This will best be apprehended, if we examine it, as it relates to visible objects. "Let us suppose that I am at present employed in the act of reading. I appear to take in whole words, and indeed clusters of words, by a single act of the mind. But let it be granted for a moment, that I see each letter successively. Yet each letter is made up of parts: the letter D, for example, of a right line and a curve, and each of these lines of the successive addition or fluxion of points. If I consider the line as a whole, yet its extension is one thing, and its terminations another. I could not see the letter, if the black line that describes it, and the white surface that bounds it, were not each of them in the view of my organ. There must therefore, as it should seem, upon the hypothesis above stated, be an infinite succession of ideas in the mind, before it could apprehend the simplest objects with which we are conversant. But we have no feeling of any such thing, but rather of the precise contrary. Thousands of human beings go out of the world, without ever apprehending that lines are composed of the addition or fluxion of points. An hypothesis, that is in direct opposition to so many apparent facts, must have a very uncommon portion of evidence to sustain it, if indeed it can be sustained."

The



The true answer to this objection seems to be as follows. The mind can apprehend only a single idea at once, but that idea needs not be a simple idea. The mind can apprehend two or more objects at a single effort, but it cannot apprehend them as two. There seems no sufficient reason to deny, that all those objects which are painted at once upon the retina of the eye, produce a joint and simultaneous impression upon the mind. But they are not immediately conceived by the mind as many, but as one: the recollection may occur that they are made up of parts, but these parts cannot be considered by us otherwise than successively. The resolution of objects into their simple elements, is an operation of science and improvement; but it is altogether foreign to our first and original conceptions. In all cases, the operations of our understanding, are rather analytical than synthetical, rather those of resolution than composition. We do not begin with the successive perception of elementary parts till we have obtained an idea of a whole; but, beginning with a whole, are capable of reducing it into its elements.

A second difficulty is of a much subtler nature. It consists in the seeming "impossibility of performing any mental operation, such as comparison for example, which has relation to two or more ideas, if we have not both ideas before us at once, if one of them be completely vanished and gone, before the other begins to exist." The source of this dif-

from various  
mental operations:

as comparison:



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CHAP. IX.

ficulty, seems to lie, in the mistake of supposing that there is a real interval between the two ideas. It will perhaps be found upon an accurate examination, that, though we cannot have two ideas at once, yet it is not just to say, that the first has perished, before the second begins to exist. The instant that connects them, is of no real magnitude, and produces no real division. The mind is always full. It is this instant therefore, that is the true point of comparison.

It may be objected, "that comparison is rather a matter of retrospect, deciding between two ideas that have been completely apprehended, than a perception which occurs in the middle, before the second has been observed." To this objection experience will perhaps be found to furnish the true answer. We find in fact that we cannot compare two objects, till we have passed and repassed them in the mind.

apprehen-  
tion.

"Supposing this account of the operation of the mind in comparison to be admitted, yet what shall we say to a complex sentence, containing twenty ideas, the sense of which I fully apprehend at a single hearing, nay, even, in some cases, by the time one half of it has been uttered?"

The mere task of understanding what is affirmed to us, is of a very different nature from that of comparison, or of any other species of judgment that is to be formed concerning this affirmation. When a number of ideas are presented in a train, though



in one sense there be variety, yet in another there is unity. First, there is the unity of uninterrupted succession, the perennial flow as of a stream, where the drop indeed that succeeds, is numerically distinct from that which went before, but there is no cessation. Secondly, there is the unity of method. The mind apprehends, as the discourse proceeds, a strict association, from similarity or some other source, between each idea as it follows in the process, and that which went before it.

The faculty of understanding the different parts of a discourse in their connection with each other, simple as it appears, is in reality of gradual and slow acquisition. We are, by various causes, excluded from a minute observation of the progress of the infant mind, and therefore do not readily conceive by how imperceptible advances it arrives at a quickness of apprehension, relative to the simplest sentences. But we more easily remark its subsequent improvement, and perceive how long it is, before it can apprehend a discourse of considerable length, or a sentence of great abstraction.

Nothing is more certain, than the possibility of my perceiving the sort of relation that exists between the different parts of a methodical discourse, for example, Mr. Burke's Speech upon Oeconomical Reform, though it be impossible for me, after the severest attention, to consider the several parts otherwise than successively. I have a latent feeling of this relation as the discourse proceeds, but I cannot



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not give a firm judgment respecting it, otherwise than by retrospect. It may however be suspected, even in the case of simple apprehension, that an accurate attention to the operations of the mind would show, that we scarcely in any instance hear a single sentence, without returning again and again upon the steps of the speaker, and drawing more closely in our minds the preceding members of his period, before he arrives at its conclusion; though even this exertion of mind, subtle as it is, be not of itself thought sufficient, to authorise us to give a judgment of the whole.

Rapidity of  
the succeſ-  
ſion of ideas.

But, if the principle here ſtated be true, how infinitely rapid muſt be the ſucceſſion of ideas? While I am ſpeaking, no two ideas are in my mind at the ſame time, and yet with what facility do I paſs from one to another? If my diſcourſe be argumen- tative, how often do I paſs in review the topics of which it conſiſts, before I utter them; and, even while I am ſpeaking, continue the review at inter- vals, without producing any pauſe in my diſcourſe? How many other ſenſations are experienced by me during this period, without ſo much as interrupt- ing, that is, without materially diverting the train of my ideas? My eye ſucceſſively remarks a thou- ſand objects that preſent themſelves. My mind wanders to the different parts of my body, and receives a ſenſation from the chair upon which I ſit, or the table upon which I lean; from the pinching of a ſhoe, from a ſinging in my ear, a pain in my head,



head, or an irritation of the breast. When these most perceptibly occur, my mind passes from one to another, without feeling the minutest obstacle, or being in any degree distracted by their multiplicity. From this cursory view of the subject, it appears that we have a multitude of different successive perceptions in every moment of our existence\*.—To return.

Consciousness, as it has been above defined, appears to be one of the departments of memory. Now the nature of memory, so far as it relates to the subject of which we are treating, is obvious. An infinite number of thoughts passed through my mind in the last five minutes of my existence. How many of them am I now able to recollect? How many of them shall I recollect to-morrow? One impression after another is perpetually effacing from this intellectual register. Some of them may with great attention and effort be revived; others obtrude themselves uncalled for; and a third sort are perhaps out of the reach of any power of thought to reproduce, as having never left their traces behind them for a moment. If the memory be capable of so many variations and degrees of

Application.

\* An attempt has been made to calculate these, but there is no reason to believe that the calculation deserves to be considered as a standard of truth. Sensations leave their images behind them, some for a longer and some for a shorter time; so that, in two different instances, the calculation is in one case eight, and in another three hundred and twenty to a second. See Watson on Time, Ch. II.

intensity,



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CHAP. IX.Duration  
measured  
by consci-  
ousness.

intensity, may there not be some cases with which it never connects itself? If the succession of thoughts be so inexpressibly rapid, may they not pass over some topics with so delicate a touch, as to elude the supplement of consciousness?

It seems to be consciousness, rather than the succession of ideas, that measures time to the mind. The succession of ideas is, in all cases, exceedingly rapid, and it is by no means clear that it can be accelerated. We find it impracticable in the experiment, to retain any idea in our mind unvaried for any perceptible duration. Continual flux appears to take place in every part of the universe. Of thought, may be said, in a practical sense, what has been affirmed of matter, that it is infinitely divisible. Yet time seems, to our apprehension, to flow, now with a precipitated, and now with a tardy course. The indolent man reclines for hours in the shade; and, though his mind be perpetually at work, the silent progress of time is unobserved. But, when acute pain, or uneasy expectation, obliges consciousness to recur with unusual force, the time appears insupportably long. Indeed it is a contradiction in terms to suppose that the succession of thoughts, where there is nothing that perceptibly links them together, where they totally elude the memory and instantly vanish, can be a measure of time to the mind. That there is such a state of mind, in some cases assuming a permanent form, has been so much the general opinion of mankind, that



that it has obtained a name, and is called reverie. It is probable from what has been said, that thoughts of reverie, understanding by that appellation thoughts untransmitted to the memory, perpetually take their turn with our more express and digested thoughts, even in the most active scenes of our life.

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Lastly, thought may be the source of animal motion, and yet there may be no need of a distinct thought producing each individual motion. This is a very essential point in the subject before us. In uttering a cry for example, the number of muscles and articulations of the body concerned in this operation is very great; shall we say that the infant has a distinct thought for each of these articulations?

3. a distinct thought to each motion may be unnecessary:

The answer to this question will be considerably facilitated, if we recollect the manner in which the impressions are blended, which we receive from external objects. The sense of feeling is diffused over every part of my body, I feel the different substances that support me, the pen I guide, various affections and petty irregularities in different parts of my frame, nay, the very air that environs me. But all these impressions are absolutely simultaneous, and I can have only one perception at once. Out of these various impressions, the most powerful, or that which has the greatest advantage to solicit my attention, overcomes and drives out the rest; or, which not less frequently happens, some idea of association,

apparent from the complexity of sensible impressions.



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association, suggested by the last preceding idea, wholly withdraws my attention from every external object. It is probable however, that this perception is imperceptibly modified by the miniature impressions which accompany it, just as we actually find that the very same ideas presented to a sick man, take a peculiar tinge, which renders them exceedingly different from what they are in the mind of a man in health. It has been already shown that, though there is nothing less frequent than the apprehending of a simple idea, yet every idea, however complex, offers itself to the mind under the conception of unity. The blending of numerous impressions into one perception, is a law of our nature; and the customary train of our perceptions is entirely of this denomination. After this manner, not only every perception is complicated by a variety of simultaneous impressions, but every idea that now offers itself to the mind, is modified by all the ideas that ever existed in it. It is this circumstance, that constitutes the insensible empire of prejudice; and causes every object, which is exhibited to a number of individuals, to assume as many forms in their mind, as there are individuals who view it.

The mind  
always  
thinks.

These remarks furnish us with an answer to the long disputed question, whether the mind always thinks? It appears that innumerable impressions are perpetually made upon our body; and the only way in which the slightest of these is prevented from conveying



conveying a distinct report to the mind, is in consequence of its being overpowered by some more considerable impression. It cannot therefore be alleged, "that, as one impression is found to be overpowered by another while we wake, the strongest only of the simultaneous impressions furnishing an idea to the mind; so the whole set of simultaneous impressions during sleep, may be overpowered by some indisposition of the sensorium, and entirely fail of its effect." For, first, the cases are altogether different. From the explication above given, it appeared, that not one of the impressions was really lost, but tended, though in a very limited degree, to modify the predominant impression. Secondly, nothing can be more absurd than this supposition. Sleep ought, according to this scheme, to cease of itself after the expiration of a certain term, but to be incapable of interruption from any experiment I might make upon the sleeper. To what purpose call or shake him? This act evinces my knowledge, and its success the truth of my knowledge, that he is in a state susceptible of impression. But, if susceptible of impression, then impressed, by bed-clothes, &c. Shall we say, "that it requires an impression of a certain magnitude to excite the sensorium?" But a clock shall strike in the room and not wake him, when a voice of a much lower key produces that effect. What is the precise degree of magnitude necessary? We actually find the ineffectual calls that are addressed to us, as well as various



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various other sounds, occasionally mixing with our dreams, without our being aware from whence these new perceptions arose. Thus it appears that every, the most minute, impression that is made upon our bodies in a state of sleep or deliquium, is conveyed to the mind, however faint may be its effect, or however it may be overpowered and swallowed up by other sensations or circumstances.

Let it however be observed, that the question, whether the mind always thinks, is altogether different from the question, which has sometimes been confounded with it, whether a sleeping man always dreams. The arguments here adduced seem conclusive as to the first question, but there is some reason to believe, that there have been men who never once dreamed in the whole course of their lives.

To apply these observations. If a number of impressions acting upon the mind, may come to us so blended as to make up one thought or perception, why may not one thought, in cases where the mind acts as a principle, produce a variety of motions? It has already been shown that there is no essential difference between the two cases. The mind is completely passive in both. Is there any sufficient reason to show, that, though it be possible for one substance, considered as the recipient of effects, to be the subject of a variety of simultaneous impressions, yet it is impossible for one substance, considered as a cause, to produce a variety of simultaneous



taneous motions? If it be granted that there is not, if the mere modification of a thought designing a motion in chief (a cry, for example, or a motion of the limbs), may produce a secondary motion, then it must perhaps further be confessed possible, for that modification which my first thought produced in my second, to carry on the motion, even though the second thought be upon a subject altogether different.

The consequences, which seem deducible from this theory of mind, are sufficiently memorable. By shewing the extreme subtlety and simplicity of thought, it removes many of the difficulties, that might otherwise rest upon its finer and more evanescent operations. If thought, in order to be the source of animal motion, need not have, either the nature of volition, or the concomitant of consciousness, and if a single thought may become a complex source, and produce a variety of motions, it will then become exceedingly difficult to trace its operations, or to discover any circumstances in a particular instance of animal motion, which can sufficiently indicate that thought was not the principle of its production, and by that means supersede the force of the general arguments adduced in the beginning of this chapter. Hence therefore it appears, that all those motions, which are observed to exist in substances having perception, and which are not to be discovered in substances of any other species, may reasonably be suspected to have

Conclusion.



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The theory  
applied to  
the pheno-  
menon of  
walking :

thought, the distinguishing peculiarity of such substances, for their source.

There are various classes of motion which will fall under this definition, beside those already enumerated. An example of one of these classes, suggests itself, in the phenomenon of walking. An attentive observer will perceive various symptoms, calculated to persuade him, that every step he takes, during the longest journey, is the production of thought. Walking is, in all cases, originally a voluntary motion. In a child, when he learns to walk, in a rope-dancer, when he begins to practise that particular exercise, the distinct determination of mind, preceding each step, is sufficiently perceptible. It may be absurd to say, that a long series of motions can be the result of so many express volitions, when these supposed volitions leave no trace in the memory. But it is not unreasonable to believe, that a species of motion which began in express design, may, though it ceases to be the subject of conscious attention, owe its continuance to a continued series of thoughts flowing in that direction, and that, if life were taken away, material impulse would not carry on the exercise for a moment. We actually find, that, when our thoughts in a train are more than commonly earnest, our pace slackens, and sometimes our going forward is wholly suspended, particularly in any less common species of walking, such as that of descending a flight of stairs. In ascending the case is still more difficult,



difficult, and accordingly we are accustomed wholly to suspend the regular progress of reflection during that operation.

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Another class of motions of a still subtler nature, are the regular motions of the animal economy, such as the circulation of the blood, and the pulsation of the heart. Are thought and perception the medium of these motions? We have the same argument here as in the former instances, conjunction of event. When thought begins, these motions also begin; and, when it ceases, they are at an end. They are therefore either the cause or effect of percipency, or mind; but we shall be inclined to embrace the latter side of this dilemma, when we recollect, that we are probably acquainted with many instances in which thought is the immediate cause of motions, which scarcely yield in subtlety to these; but that, as to the origin of the faculty of thought, we are wholly uninformed. Add to this, that there are probably no motions of the animal economy, which we do not find it in the power of volition, and still more of our involuntary sensations, to hasten or retard.

to the circulation of the blood.

It is far from certain, that the phenomenon of motion can any where exist, where there is not thought. Motion may be distributed into four classes; the simpler motions, which result from what are called the essential properties of matter, and the laws of impulse; the more complex ones, which cannot be accounted for by the assumption of

Of motion in general.



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these laws ; such as gravitation, elasticity, electricity and magnetism, the motions of the vegetable, and of the animal systems. Each of these seems further than that which preceded it, from being accounted for by any thing we understand of the nature of matter.

## Of dreams.

Some light may be derived from what has been here advanced, upon the phenomenon of dreams. “In sleep we sometimes imagine,” for example, “that we read long passages from books, or hear a long oration from a speaker. In all cases, scenes and incidents pass before us, that, in various ways, excite our passions, and interest our feelings. Is it possible that these should be the unconscious production of our own minds ?”

It has already appeared, that volition is the accidental, and by no means the necessary concomitant, even of those thoughts which are most active and efficient in the producing of motion. It is therefore no more to be wondered at, that the mind should be busied in the composition of books, which it appears to read, than that a train of thoughts of any other kind should pass through it, without a consciousness of its being the author. In fact we perpetually annex erroneous ideas to this phrase, that we are the authors. Though mind be a real and proper antecedent, it is in no case a first cause, a thing indeed of which we have in no case any experimental knowledge. Thought is the medium through which operations are produced. Ideas succeed



ceed each other in our sensorium according to certain necessary laws. The most powerful impression, either from without or within, constantly gets the better of its competitors, and forcibly drives out the preceding thought, till it is in the same irresistible manner driven out by its successor.

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## CHAP. X.

### OF SELF-LOVE AND BENEVOLENCE.

*Question stated.—Nature of voluntary action.—Origin of benevolence.—Operation of habit—of opinion.—Reflex operation of enjoyment.—Complexity of motives.—Of malevolence.—Scheme of self-love incompatible with virtue.—Conclusion.*

THE subject of the mechanism of the human mind, is the obvious counterpart of that which we are now to examine. Under the former of these topics we have entered, with considerable minuteness, into the nature of our involuntary actions; the decision of the latter will, in a great degree, depend upon an accurate conception of such as are voluntary. The question of self-love and benevolence, is a question relative to the feelings and ideas by which we ought to be governed, in our intercourse with our fellow men, or, in other words, in our moral conduct. But it is universally

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Question  
stated.



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admitted, that there can be no moral conduct, that we can be neither virtuous nor vicious, except in instances where our actions flow from intention, and are directed by foresight, or where they might have been so directed; and this is the definition of voluntary actions\*. The question therefore of self-love and benevolence, is a question of voluntary action.

The enquiry here proposed, is the same in effect, as the question, whether we are capable of being influenced by disinterested considerations. Once admit that we are, and it will not be disputed that it is by such considerations we ought to be influenced, in cases where our neighbour or the public is to be eminently benefited.

This question has been long and eagerly contested, and the majority of persons who are accustomed to give some attention to speculations of this sort, have ranged themselves on the side of self-love. Among the French, not a single writer upon the nature of the human mind, is to be found, who does not, with more or less explicitness, declare for this hypothesis. Among ourselves, several authors of eminence, have undertaken to support the practicability of disinterested action†.

\* Book I, Chap. V, p. 56, 68.

† Particularly Shaftesbury, Butler, Hutcheson and Hume. The active and ardent spirit of the founders of religion, has perhaps always carried them into the liberal system. See MATT. ch. xxii. ver. 37—41.



One of the writers who first contributed to render this enquiry a subject of general attention, was the duke de la Rochefoucault. He asserted the system of self-love in its grossest form; and his exposition of it amounts to little less, than “that, in every action of our lives, we are directed by a calculation of personal interest.” This notion has been gradually softened down by his successors; and the hypothesis of self-love is now frequently explained to mean only, “that, as every state of a percipient being has in it a mixture of pleasure or pain, the immediate sensation in either of these kinds is to be regarded as the sole, proper, and necessary cause of the subsequent action.” This fluctuation among the adherents of self-love, has had the effect, of making some of the arguments with which their principle has been attacked, apparently inapplicable to the newest state of the question. Let us see whether the point may not be put upon a simpler issue than has usually been attempted.

An unanswerable argument for the system of disinterestedness, is contained in a proposition so obvious, as for its very plainness to be exposed to the risque of contempt, *viz.* that the motive of every voluntary action, consists in the view present to the mind of the agent at the time of his determination. This is an inference which immediately results from the nature of volition. Volition is an affair of foresight\*. “No motion is voluntary,

Nature of  
voluntary  
action.

\* Book I, Chap. V, p. 56.



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any further than it is accompanied with intention and design, and has for its proper antecedent the apprehension of an end to be accomplished. So far as it flows in any degree from another source, it is involuntary\*.” But, if this be a just description of voluntary action, then the converse of this assertion must also be true; that whatever is proposed by the mind as an end to be accomplished, whether it be life or death, pleasure or pain, and relate to myself or my neighbour, has in it the true essence of a motive.—To illustrate this in relation to the subject in hand.

Origin of  
benevo-  
lence.

Voluntary action cannot exist but as the result of experience. Neither desire nor aversion can have place, till we have had a consciousness of agreeable and disagreeable sensations. Voluntary action implies desire, and the idea of certain means to be employed for the attainment of the thing desired.

The things first desired by every thinking being, will be agreeable sensation, and the means of agreeable sensation. If he foresee any thing that is not apprehended to be pleasure or pain, or the means of pleasure or pain, this will excite no desire, and lead to no voluntary action.

A disposition to promote the benefit of another, my child, my friend, my relation, or my fellow being, is one of the passions; understanding by the term passion, a permanent and habitual tendency towards a certain course of action. It is of the

\* Chap. VII, p. 376.



same general nature, as avarice, or the love of fame. The good of my neighbour could not, in the first instance, have been chosen, but as the means of agreeable sensation. His cries, or the spectacle of his distress importune me, and I am irresistibly impelled to adopt means to remove this importunity. The child perceives, in his own case, that menaces or soothing tend to stop his cries, and he is induced to employ, in a similar instance, that mode of the two which seems most within his reach. He thinks little of the sufferings endured, and is only uneasy at the impression made upon his organs. To this motive, he speedily adds the idea of esteem and gratitude, which are to be purchased by his beneficence. Thus the good of our neighbour, like the possession of money, is originally pursued for the sake of its advantage to ourselves.

But it is the nature of the passions, speedily to convert what at first were means, into ends. The avaricious man forgets the utility of money which first incited him to pursue it, fixes his passion upon the money itself, and counts his gold, without having in his mind any idea but that of seeing and handling it. Something of this sort happens very early in the history of every passion. The moment we become attached to a particular source of pleasure, beyond any idea we have of the rank it holds in the catalogue of sources, it must be admitted that it is loved for its own sake. The man who pursues wealth or fame with any degree of ardour,

Operation  
of habit.



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dour, soon comes to concentrate his attention in the wealth or the fame, without carrying his mind beyond, or thinking of any thing that is to result from them.

This is merely one case of the phenomena of habit\*. All indulgence of the senses, is originally chosen, for the sake of the pleasure that accrues. But the quantity of accruing pleasure or pain, is continually changing. This however is seldom adverted to; and when it is, the power of habit is frequently too strong to be thus subdued. The propensity to do again what we have been accustomed to do, recurs, when the motive that should restrain us has escaped from our thoughts. Thus the drunkard and the lecher continue to pursue the same course of action, long after the pains have outweighed the pleasures, and even after they confess and know this to be the real state of the case. It is in this manner that men will often, for the sake of that which has become the object of a favourite passion, consent to sacrifice what they generally know to contain in it a greater sum of agreeable sensations. It is a trite and incontrovertible axiom, "that they will rather die, than part with it."

If this be the case in the passion of avarice or the love of fame, it must also be true in the instance of beneficence, that, after having habituated ourselves to promote the happiness of our child, our

\* Book I, Chap. V, p. 64.

family,



family, our country or our species, we are at length brought to approve and desire their happiness without retrospect to ourselves. It happens in this instance, as in the former, that we are occasionally actuated by the most perfect disinterestedness, and willingly submit to tortures and death, rather than see injury committed upon the object of our affections.

Thus far there is a parallel nature in avarice and benevolence. But ultimately there is a wide difference between them. When once we have entered into so auspicious a path as that of disinterestedness, reflection confirms our choice, in a sense in which it never can confirm any of the factitious passions we have named. We find by observation, that we are surrounded by beings of the same nature with ourselves. They have the same senses, are susceptible of the same pleasures and pains, capable of being raised to the same excellence, and employed in the same usefulness\*. We are able in imagination to go out of ourselves, and become impartial spectators of the system of which we are a part. We can then make an estimate of our intrinsic and absolute value; and detect the imposition of that self-regard, which would represent our own interest as of as much value as that of all the world beside. The delusion being thus sapped, we can, from time to time at least, fall back in idea

of opinion.

\* Book II, Chap. III, p. 146.

into



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into our proper post, and cultivate those views and affections which must be most familiar to the most perfect intelligence.

It is admitted on all hands that it is possible for a man to sacrifice his own existence to that of twenty others. Here then is an action possessing various recommendations: the advantage to arise to twenty men; their tranquillity and happiness through a long period of remaining existence; the benefits they will not fail to confer on thousands of their contemporaries, and through them on millions of posterity; and lastly his own escape from uneasiness, and momentary exultation in an act of virtue. The advocates of the system of self-love, are compelled to assert, that the last consideration only is of any value with him; and that he perceives the real state of the case, without feeling himself in the smallest degree directly and properly affected by it. He engages in an act of generosity, without one atom of true sympathy, and wholly and exclusively influenced by considerations of the most selfish description.

It is not easily to conceive an hypothesis more singular than this. It is in direct opposition to experience, and what every man seems to know of himself. It undertakes to maintain, that we are under a delusion of the most extraordinary sort; and which would appear, to a person not trained in a philosophical system, of all others the most improbable.



improbable. It affirms, that we are wholly incapable of being influenced by motives which seem to have an absolute power ; that the philanthropist has no love for mankind, nor the patriot for his country ; that no child ever had an affection for his parent, or parent for his child ; in a word, that, when we imagine we are most generously concerned for another, we have no concern for him, but are anxious only for ourselves. Undoubtedly a thesis of this sort is in need of very cogent arguments to support it.

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It must be admitted indeed as characteristic of every determination of the mind, that, when made, we feel uneasiness in the apprehension of any obstacle, and pleasure in indulging the desire, and seeing events turn out conformably to the desire. But it would be absurd to say, “ that the motive of our proceeding, in this case, is impatience and uneasiness, and that we are impelled to the sacrifices which are frequently made, by the mere wish to free ourselves from intolerable pain.” Impatience and uneasiness are only generated by obstacles to the attainment of our desires ; and we often fulfil our purposes with a swiftness and impetuosity that leave no leisure for the recurrence of pain. The uneasiness of unfulfilled desire, implies the desire itself as the antecedent and parent of the uneasiness. It is because I wish my neighbour’s advantage, that I am uneasy at his misfortune. I should no more be uneasy about this, than about the number of

Reflex operation of enjoyment.



of syllables contained in the present paragraph, if I had not previously loved it for its own sake.

This pleasure and pain however, though not the authors of my determination, undoubtedly tend to perpetuate and strengthen it. Such is conspicuously the case in the present instance. The man, who vigilantly conforms his affections to the standard of justice, who loses the view of personal regards in the greater objects that engross his attention, who, from motives of benevolence, sits loose to life and all its pleasures, and is ready, without a sigh, to sacrifice them to the public good, has an uncommonly exquisite source of happiness. When he looks back, he applauds the state of his own affections; and, when he looks out of himself, his sensations are refined, in proportion to the comprehensiveness of his sentiments. He is filled with harmony within; and the state of his thoughts is uncommonly favourable to what we may venture to style the sublime emotions of tranquillity. It is not to be supposed that an experience of the pleasures of benevolence, should not tend to confirm in us a benevolent propensity.

Complexity  
of motives.

The hypothesis of disinterestedness would never have had so many adversaries, if the complexity of human motives had been sufficiently considered. To illustrate this, let it be recollected that every voluntary action has in it a mixture of involuntary\*.

\* Book I, Chap. V. p. 68.



In the sense in which we have used the word motive in an early part of this work \*, it is equally descriptive of the cause of action in both cases. Motive may therefore be distinguished, according to its different relations, into direct and indirect; understanding by the direct, that which is present to the mind of the agent at the time of his determination, and which belongs to every voluntary action, and to so much of every action as is voluntary; and by the indirect, that which operates without being adverted to by the mind, whether in the case of actions originally involuntary, or that have become so, in whole, or in part, by the force of habit. Thus explained, it is incontrovertibly evident that the direct motive to many of our actions is purely disinterested. We are capable of self-oblivion, as well as of sacrifice. All that is strictly voluntary, in the beneficence of a man habitually generous and kind, commences from this point: if other considerations intervene in the sequel, they are indebted for their intervention to the disinterested motive. But, at the same time that this truth is clearly established, it is not less true, first, that the indirect and original motive, that which laid the foundation of all our habits, is the love of agreeable sensation. Secondly, it is also to be admitted, that there is probably something personal directly and perceptibly mixing itself with such of our beneficent actions as are of a sensible duration. We are so accustomed to fix our

\* P. 56.



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attention upon agreeable sensation, that we can scarcely fail to recollect, at every interval, the gratitude we shall excite, or the approbation we shall secure, the pleasure that will result to ourselves from our neighbour's well-being, the joys of self-applause, or the uneasiness that attends upon ungratified desire. Yet, after every deduction that can be made, the disinterested and direct motive, the profit and advantage of our neighbour, seems to occupy the principal place. This is at least the first, often the only, thing in the view of the mind, at the time the action is chosen. It is this from which, by way of eminence, it derives the character of voluntary action.

Of male-  
volence.

There is an observation arising in this place, which it seems of some importance to mention. Pure malevolence is the counterpart of disinterested virtue; and almost all the considerations that prove the existence of the one, are of equal avail to prove the existence of the other. It is not enough to say, I choose the pleasure or pain of my neighbour, for the sake of the gratification I have in contemplating it. This only removes the difficulty a single step, and will not account for the phenomenon of habit in either case. Both the one and the other are originally chosen with a view to agreeable sensation; but in both cases the original view is soon forgotten. It is as certain, that there are human beings who take pleasure in shrieks and agony, without a prospect to any thing further



or different; as that the miser comes at last to regard his guineas with delight, independently of a recollection of the benefits they may purchase.

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There is one further remark, which, though by no means so conclusive as many that have been adduced, ought not to be omitted. If self-love be the only principle of action, there can be no such thing as virtue. Benevolent intention is essential to virtue\*. Virtue, where it exists in any eminence, is a species of conduct, modelled upon a true estimate of the different reasons inviting us to preference. He, that makes a false estimate, and prefers a trivial and partial good to an important and comprehensive one, is vicious. Virtue requires a certain disposition and view of the mind, and does not belong to the good which may accidentally and unintentionally result from our proceeding. The creditor that, from pure hardness of disposition, should cast a man into prison who, unknown to him, was upon the point of committing some atrocious and sanguinary action, would be not virtuous but vicious. The mischief to result from the project of his debtor, was no part of his motive; he thought only of gratifying his inordinate passion. Just so, in the case stated a little before, the public benefactor, upon the system of self-love, prefers a single individual to twenty, or to twenty millions. So far as relates to the real merits of the case, his own advan-

Scheme of  
self-love in-  
compatible  
with virtue.

\* Book II, Chap. IV.



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CHAP. X.

tage or pleasure is a very insignificant consideration, and the benefit to be produced, suppose to a world, is inestimable. Yet he falsely and unjustly prefers the first, and regards the latter, separately taken, as nothing. If there be such a thing as justice, if I have a real and absolute value, upon which truth can decide, and which can be compared with what is greater or less, then, according to this system, the best action that ever was performed, may, for any thing we know, have been the action, in the whole world, of the most exquisite and deliberate injustice. Nay, it could not have been otherwise, since it produced the greatest good, and therefore was the individual instance, in which the greatest good was most directly postponed to personal gratification. Such is the spirit of the doctrine we have endeavoured to refute.

On the other hand, the just result of the arguments above adduced is, that men are capable of understanding the beauty of virtue, and the claims of other men upon their benevolence; and, understanding them, that these views, as well as every other perception which has relation to sensitive existence, are of the nature of motives, sometimes overpowered by other considerations, and sometimes overpowering them, but always in their own nature capable of exciting to action, when not counteracted by pleas of a different sort. Men are capable, no doubt, of preferring an inferior interest of their own to a superior interest of others; but this preference



arises from a combination of circumstances, and is not the necessary and invariable law of our nature\*.

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Conclusion.

There is no doctrine in which the generous and elevated mind rests with more satisfaction than in that of which we are treating. If it be false, it is no doubt incumbent upon us to make the best of the small remnant of good that remains. But it is a discouraging prospect for the moralist, who, when he has done all, has no hope to persuade mankind to one atom of real affection towards any one individual of their species. We may be made indeed the instruments of good, but in a way less honourable, than that in which a frame of wood, or a sheet of paper, may be made the instrument of good. The wood, or the paper, is at least neutral. But we are drawn into the service, with affections of a diametrically opposite direction. When we perform the most benevolent action, it is with a view only to our own advantage, and with the most sovereign and unreserved neglect of that of others. We are instruments of good, in the same manner as bad men are said to be the instruments of provi-

\* Some persons, friendly to the doctrine of this chapter, have objected to the remark, that, "upon the system of self-love, there can be no such thing as virtue," as too broad, or too incautiously expressed. Undoubtedly it was not intended in this place to assert, that the different tendencies of actions would not remain upon both systems, or that habits conducive to the general welfare, would not deserve to be sedulously cultivated, in ourselves and others, however mean and ignoble might be the motives from which they sprung.



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dence, even when their inclinations are most refractory to its decrees. In this sense, we may admire the system of the universe, where public utility results from each man's contempt of that utility, and where the most beneficial actions, of those whom we have been accustomed to term the best men, are only instances in which justice and the real merits of the case are most flagrantly violated. But we can think with little complacence of the individuals of whom this universe is composed. It is no wonder that philosophers whose system has taught them to look upon their fellow men as thus perverse and unjust, have been frequently cold in their temper, or narrow in their designs. It is no wonder that Rousseau, the most benevolent of them, and who most escaped the general contagion, has been driven to place the perfection of virtue in doing no injury \*. Neither philosophy, nor morality, nor politics, will ever show like itself, till man shall be acknowledged for what he really is, a being capable of rectitude, virtue and benevolence, and who needs not always be led to actions of general utility, by foreign and frivolous considerations.

The system of disinterested benevolence proves to us, that it is possible to be virtuous, and not merely to talk of virtue; that all which has been said by philosophers and moralists respecting impartial justice, is not an unmeaning rant; and that,

\* "*La plus sublime vertu est negative; elle nous instruit de ne jamais faire du mal à personne.*" *Emile*, Liv. II.

when



when we call upon mankind to divest themselves of selfish and personal considerations, we call upon them for something they are able to practise. An idea like this, reconciles us to our species; teaches us to regard, with enlightened admiration, the men who have appeared to lose the feeling of their personal existence, in the pursuit of general advantage; and gives us reason to expect that, as men collectively advance in science and useful institution, they will proceed more and more to consolidate their private judgment, and their individual will, with abstract justice, and the unmixed approbation of general happiness.

What are the inferences that ought to be made from this doctrine with respect to political institution? Certainly not that the interest of the individual, ought to be made incompatible with the part he is expected to take in the interest of the whole. This is neither desirable, nor even possible. But that social institution needs not despair of seeing men influenced by other and better motives. The true politician is bound to recollect, that the perfection of mind consists in disinterestedness. He should regard it as the ultimate object of his exertions, to induce men to estimate themselves at their just value, and neither to grant to themselves, nor claim from others, a higher consideration than they deserve. Above all, he should be careful not to add vigour to the selfish passions. He should gradually wean men from contemplating their own benefit



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in all that they do, and induce them to view with complacence the advantage that is to result to others. Great mischief, in this respect, has probably been done by those moralists, who think only of stimulating men to good deeds by considerations of frigid prudence and mercenary self-interest, and never apply themselves to excite one generous and magnanimous sentiment of our natures. This has been too much the case with the teachers of religion, even those of them who are most eager in their hostility to religious enthusiasm.

The last perfection of the sentiment here vindicated, consists in that state of mind, which bids us rejoice as fully in the good that is done by others, as if it were done by ourselves. The man who shall have attained to this improvement, will be actuated neither by interest nor ambition, the love of honour, nor the love of fame. He has a duty indeed obliging him to seek the good of the whole; but that good is his only object. If that good be effected by another hand, he feels no disappointment. All men are his fellow labourers, but he is the rival of no man. Like Pedaretus in ancient story, he is ready to exclaim: "I also have endeavoured to deserve; but there are three hundred citizens in Sparta better than myself, and I rejoice."



## CHAP. XI.

## OF GOOD AND EVIL.

*Definitions.—Principle of the Stoics examined.—Pleasure delineated.—Scale of happiness—the peasant and artisan—the man of wealth—the man of taste—the man of benevolence.—Inference.—System of optimism.—Errors of this system.—Mixture of truth.—Limitations.—Condition of the universe displayed.—Ill effects of optimism.—It is destructive of any consistent theory of virtue—blunts the delicacy of moral discrimination—reconciles us to the spectacle of perverseness in others.—Of persecution.*

THERE is no disquisition more essential either in morality or politics, than that which shall tend to give us clear and distinct ideas of good and evil, what it is we should desire, and what we should deprecate. We will therefore close the present volume with a few considerations upon this head.

The nature of good and evil, which is one of the plainest subjects upon which the human mind can be engaged, has been obscured by two sets of men: those who, from an eagerness to refine and exalt beyond measure the nature of virtue, have elevated it into something impossible and unmean-



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ing: and those who, spurning the narrow limits of science and human understanding, have turned system-builders, and fabricated a universe after their own peculiar fancy. We shall see, as we proceed, what has been the operation of these two errors. In the mean time it may be most safe, to examine the subject in its genuine simplicity, uninfluenced by the preconceptions of party.

## Definitions.

Good is a general name, including pleasure, and the means by which pleasure is procured. Evil is a general name, including pain, and the means by which pain is produced. Of the two things included in these general names, the first is cardinal and substantive, the second has no intrinsic recommendations, but depends for its value on the other. Pleasure therefore is to be termed an absolute good; the means of pleasure are only relatively good. The same observation may be stated of pain\*.

We inhabit a world where sensations do not come detached, but where every thing is linked and connected together. Of consequence, among things absolutely good there may be two classes. There are some things that are good and only good, pleasures that do not draw after them mischief, anguish and remorse. There may be other pleasures that are attended in the sequel with an overbalance of pain, and which, though absolutely good, are relatively evil. There may also be pains

\* Book III, Chap. III, p. 200.

which,



which, taken together with their consequences, are salutary. But this does not alter the original proposition: where there is a mixture of evil, all is not good; just as, where there is a mixture of pain, all is not pleasure.

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Let us see how this statement affects the theory and practice of virtue.

First, we are hereby enabled to detect their mistake, who denied that "pleasure was the supreme good." The error of the Epicurean philosophers seems to have been, not in affirming that "pleasure was the supreme good," for this cannot be refuted; but in confining that pleasure which is the proper scope of human actions, to the pleasure of the individual who acts, and not admitting that the pleasure of others was an object which, for its own sake, could, and ought to be pursued\*.

Principle of  
the Stoics  
examined.

That "pleasure is the supreme good," cannot be denied by him who is sufficiently attentive to the meaning of words. That which will give pleasure neither to ourselves nor others, and from which the fruits of joy can be reaped, in no stage, and at no period, is necessarily good for nothing.

The opposers of the Epicurean maxim, were terrified by a consequence which they hastily concluded might be built upon it. If pleasure were the only thing that is worthy to be desired, they thought that every man might reasonably be justified in "walking in the sight of his own eyes,"

Pleasure delineated.

\* Chap. X.

and



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and there would be no longer any rule of human conduct. Each man might say, "Pleasure is the proper object of my pursuit; I best know what pleases me; and therefore, however opposite is the plan of my conduct to your conceptions, it is unreasonable and unjust for you to interfere with me."

An inference the opposite of this, might, with more propriety, have been drawn from the maxim upon which we are descanting. Is "pleasure the only good?" Then have we the most cogent reason for studying pleasure, and reducing it to a science, and not for leaving every man to pursue his own particular taste, which is nothing more than the result of his education, and of the circumstances in which he happens to have been placed, and which by other lessons and circumstances may be corrected.

No man is entitled to complain of my sober and dispassionate expostulations respecting the species of pleasure he thinks proper to pursue, because no man stands alone, and can pursue his private conceptions of pleasure, without affecting, beneficially or injuriously, the persons immediately connected with him, and, through them, the rest of the world. Even if he have persuaded himself that it is his business to pursue his own pleasure, and that he is not bound to attend ultimately to the pleasure of others, yet it may easily be shown that it is, generally speaking, the interest of each individual, that  
all



all should form their plan of personal pleasure with a spirit of deference and accommodation to the pleasure of each other.

But putting the circumstance of the action and re-action of men in society out of the question, still there will be a science of pleasure, and it will be idle and erroneous to consider each man separately, and leave each to find his source of pleasure suitable to his particular humour. We have a common nature, and that common nature ought to be [consulted. There is one thing, or series of things, that constitutes the true perfection of man\*.

In the discussions that took place a few years ago, in the English parliament and nation, respecting the slave-trade, the sentiment we are here combating, was used as a topic of argument, by some of those persons who, from certain deplorable prejudices, were able to prevail upon themselves to appear as advocates for this trade. "The slaves in the West Indies," they said, "are contented with their situation, they are not conscious of the evils against which you exclaim; why then should you endeavour to alter their condition?"

The true answer to this question, even granting them their fact, would be: "It is not very material to a man of a liberal and enlarged mind, whether they are contented or no. Are they contented? I am not contented for them. I see in

\* Book II, Chap. III, p. 146; Book III, Chap. VII, p. 240.

them



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them beings of certain capacities, equal to certain pursuits and enjoyments. It is of no consequence in the question, that they do not see this, that they do not know their own interests and happiness. They do not repine? Neither does a stone repine. That which you mention as an alleviation, finishes in my conception the portrait of their calamity. Abridged as they are of independence and enjoyment, they have neither the apprehension nor spirit of men. I cannot bear to see human nature thus degraded. It is my duty, if I can, to make them a thousand times happier, than they are, or have any conception of being."

Scale of  
happiness :

It is not difficult to form a scale of happiness. Suppose it to be something like the following.

the peasant  
and artisan :

The first class shall be such as we may perhaps sometimes find, among the labouring inhabitants of the civilized states of Europe. We will conceive a man, working with his hands every day to obtain his subsistence. He rises early to his labour, and leaves off every night weary and exhausted. He takes a tranquil or a boisterous refreshment, and spends the hours of darkness in uninterrupted slumber. He does not quarrel with his wife, oftener than persons of his class regularly do ; and his cares are few, as he has scarcely known the pressure of absolute want. He never repines, but when he witnesses luxuries he cannot partake, and that sensation is transient ; and he knows no diseases but those which rise from perpetual labour. The range  
of



of his ideas is scanty ; and the general train of his sensations, comes as near, as the nature of human existence will admit, to the region of indifference. This man is in a certain sense happy. He is happier than a stone.

Our next instance shall be taken from among the men of rank, fortune and dissipation. We will suppose the individual in question to have an advantageous person and a sound constitution. He enjoys all the luxuries of the palate, the choicest viands, and the best-flavoured wines. He takes his pleasures discreetly, so as not, in the pursuit of pleasure, to lose the power of feeling it. He shoots, he hunts. He frequents all public places. He sits up late in scenes of gay resort. He rises late. He has just time to ride and dress, before he goes into company again. With a happy flow of spirits and a perpetual variety of amusements, he is almost a stranger to *ennui*. But he is a model of ignorance. He never reads, and knows nothing beyond the topic of the day. He can scarcely conceive the meaning of the sublime or pathetic ; and he rarely thinks of any thing beyond himself. This man is happier than the peasant. He is happier, by all the pleasures of the palate, and all the gratifications of neatness, elegance and splendour, in himself, and the objects around him. Every day he is alive, inventing some new amusement, or enjoying it. He tastes the pleasures of liberty ; he is familiar with the gratifications of pride :  
while

the man of  
wealth :



BOOK IV.  
CHAP. XI.the man of  
taste ;

while the peasant slides through life, with something of the contemptible insensibility of an oyster.

The man of taste and liberal accomplishments, is more advantageously circumstanced than he whom we have last described. We will suppose him to possess as many of the gratifications of expence as he desires. But, in addition to these, like the mere man of fortune in comparison with the peasant, he acquires new senses, and a new range of enjoyment. The beauties of nature are all his own. He admires the overhanging cliff, the wide-extended prospect, the vast expanse of the ocean, the foliage of the woods, the sloping lawn and the waving grass. He knows the pleasures of solitude, when man holds commerce alone with the tranquil solemnity of nature. He has traced the structure of the universe ; the substances which compose the globe we inhabit, and are the materials of human industry ; and the laws which hold the planets in their course amidst the trackless fields of space. He studies ; and has experienced the pleasures which result from conscious perspicacity and discovered truth. He enters, with a true relish, into the sublime and pathetic. He partakes in all the grandeur and enthusiasm of poetry. He is perhaps himself a poet. He is conscious that he has not lived in vain, and that he shall be recollected with pleasure, and extolled with ardour, by generations yet unborn. In this person, compared with the two preceding classes, we acknowledge something



thing of the features of man. They were only a better sort of brutes ; but he has sensations and transports of which they have no conception.

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But there is a rank of man, more fitted to excite our emulation than this, the man of benevolence. Study is cold, if it be not enlivened with the idea of the happiness to arise to mankind from the cultivation and improvement of sciences \*. The sublime and pathetic are barren, unless it be the sublime of true virtue, and the pathos of true sympathy. The pleasures of the mere man of taste and refinement, “ play round the head, but come not to the heart.” There is no true joy, but in the spectacle and contemplation of happiness. There is no delightful melancholy, but in pitying distress. The man who has once performed an act of exalted generosity, knows that there is no sensation of corporeal or intellectual taste to be compared with this. The man who has sought to benefit nations, rises above the mechanical ideas of barter and exchange. He asks no gratitude. To see that they are benefited, or to believe that they will be so, is its own reward. He ascends to the highest of human pleasures, the pleasures of disinterestedness. He enjoys all the good that mankind possess, and all the good that he perceives to be in reserve for them. No man so truly promotes his own interest, as he that forgets it. No man reaps so copious a

the man of  
benevo-  
lence.

\* Chap. V, p. 311.



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Inference.

harvest of pleasure, as he who thinks only of the pleasures of other men.

The inference from this survey of human life, is, that he who is fully persuaded that pleasure is the only good, ought by no means to leave every man to enjoy his peculiar pleasure according to his own peculiar humour. Seeing the great disparity there is between different conditions of human life, he ought constantly to endeavour to raise each class, and every individual of each class, to a class above it. This is the true equalisation of mankind. Not to pull down those who are exalted, and reduce all to a naked and savage equality. But to raise those who are abased; to communicate to every man all genuine pleasures, to elevate every man to all true wisdom, and to make all men participators of a liberal and comprehensive benevolence. This is the path in which the reformers of mankind ought to travel. This is the prize they should pursue. Do you tell me, “that human society can never arrive at this improvement?” I do not stay to dispute that point with you. We can come nearer it than we are. We can come nearer and nearer yet. This will not be the first time that persons, engaged in the indefatigable pursuit of some accomplishment, have arrived at an excellence that surpassed their most sanguine expectations.

The result of this part of the subject is, that those persons have been grossly mistaken, who taught that virtue was to be pursued for its own sake,



sake, and represented pleasure and pain as trivial matters and unworthy consideration. Virtue is upon no other account valuable, than as it is the instrument of the most exquisite pleasure.—Be it observed, that it is one thing to say that pain is not an evil, which is absurd, and another thing to say that temporary pains and pleasures are to be despised, when the enduring of the one is necessary, and the declining the other unavoidable in the pursuit of excellent and permanent pleasure, which is a most fundamental precept of wisdom and morality.

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Let us proceed to a second point announced by us in the outset, the consideration of how the subject of good and evil has been darkened by certain fabulists and system-builders. The system alluded to under this head, is that of the optimists, who teach, “that every thing in the universe, is for the best; and that, if any thing had happened otherwise than it has happened, the result would have been, a diminution of the degree of happiness and good.”

System of  
optimism.

That we may escape the error into which these persons have been led, by the daringness of their genius, and their mode of estimating things in the gross, and not in detail, we must be contented to follow experience, and not to outrun it.

It has already appeared that there is in the universe absolute evil: and, if pain be evil (and it has been proved to be the only absolute evil), it cannot be denied that, in the part of the universe with

Errors of  
this system.



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which we are acquainted, it exists in considerable profusion. It has also appeared, that there is a portion of absolute evil, which is relatively good, and which therefore, the preceding circumstances being assumed, was desirable. Such, for example, is the amputation of a gangrened limb.

Whether or no those preceding circumstances were, universally, and in a comprehensive sense, good, which rendered the introduction of the absolute evil in question necessary, is, to say the least, a very doubtful point. But, if there be some presumption in the negative even in the smallest instance, this presumption against universal good is incalculably increased, when we recollect all the vice, disorder and misery, that exist in the world.

Mixture of  
truth.

Let us consider what portion there is of truth, that has been mixed with the doctrine of optimism. This is the same thing as to enquire, by means of what plausibilities it gained footing in the world. The answer to the questions lies in two circumstances.

First, there is a degree of improvement real and visible in the world. This is particularly manifest, in the history of the civilised part of mankind, during the three last centuries. The taking of Constantinople by the Turks (1453) dispersed among European nations, the small fragment of learning, which was, at that time, shut up within the walls of this metropolis. The discovery of printing was nearly contemporary with that event. These two circumstances



circumstances greatly favoured the reformation of religion, which gave an irrecoverable shock to the empire of superstition and implicit obedience. From that time, the most superficial observation can trace the improvements of art and science, which may, without glaring impropriety, be styled incessant. Not to mention essential improvements which were wholly unknown to the ancients, the most important characteristics of modern literature, are the extent of surface over which it is diffused, and the number of persons that participate in it. It has struck its roots deep, and there is no probability that it will ever be subverted. It was once the practice of moralists, to extol past times, and declaim without bound on the degeneracy of mankind. But this fashion is nearly exploded. The true state of the fact is too gross to be mistaken. And, as improvements have long continued to be incessant, so there is no chance but they will go on. The most penetrating philosophy cannot prescribe limits to them, nor the most ardent imagination adequately fill up the prospect.

Secondly, the doctrine of necessity teaches us, that all things in the universe are connected together. Nothing could have happened otherwise than it has happened. Do we congratulate ourselves upon the rising genius of freedom? Do we view with pride the improvements of mankind, and contrast with wonder, man in the state in which he once



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was, naked, ignorant and brutal, with man as we now sometimes behold him, enriched with boundless stores of science, and penetrated with sentiments of the purest philanthropy? These things could not have existed in their present form, without having been prepared by all the preceding events. Every thing the most seemingly insignificant, the most loathsome, or the most retrograde, was indissolubly bound to all that we most admire in the prospect before us. We may perhaps go a step further than this. The human mind is a principle of the simplest nature, a mere faculty of sensation or perception. It must have begun from absolute ignorance; it must obtain its improvement by slow degrees; it must pass through various stages of folly and mistake. Such is, and could not but be, the history of mankind.

## Limitations.

There are three considerations which limit that idea of optimism, which some men have been inclined to deduce from the above circumstances.

First, it applies only to that part of the universe with which we are acquainted. That deduction, whatever it is, which is authorised by the above circumstances, depends upon their junction. The general tendency to improvement, would be an insufficient apology for untoward events, if every thing were not connected; and the connection of all events, would have no just tendency to reconcile us to the scene, were it not for the visible improvement. But has improvement been the constant



characteristic of the universe? The human species seems to be but, as it were, of yesterday. Will it continue for ever? The globe we inhabit bears strong marks of convulsion, such as the teachers of religion, and the professors of natural philosophy, agree to predict, will one day destroy the inhabitants of the earth. Vicissitude therefore, rather than unbounded progress, appears to be the characteristic of nature.

Secondly, the quantity of good deducible from these circumstances, instead of meriting the name of optimism, is, in one respect, directly contrasted with it. Nothing is positively best. So far from it, that the considerations here alleged, are calculated to prove, that every thing is valuable, for this reason among others, that it leads to something better than itself.

Lastly, the points here affirmed, are by no means calculated to bear out the conclusion, that, if something else had happened, in the place of what did actually happen in any given instance, it might not have been a fortunate event. We are taught, by the doctrine of necessity, that nothing else could possibly happen under the circumstances; not that, if something else had been possible, it would not have been attended with more desirable consequences. Cæsar enslaved his country; the event was unavoidable; and the general progress of human improvement upon the whole went on, notwithstanding this disastrous occurrence. But, if it



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had been possible that Cæsar should have been diverted from this detestable enterprise, if the republic could have been restored by the battle of Mutina, or made victorious in the plains of Philippi, it might have been a most fortunate event for the whole race of mankind. There is a difficulty in conceiving that things should have been, in any respect, otherwise than they are. It may be conjectured, with much plausibility, that this is in all cases impossible. But the consideration of this, affords no ground of rejoicing in untoward events. More auspicious harbingers, would have led to more extended improvements. As to what was stated of the simplicity of the human mind, it may be observed, that the history of the species exhibits the united effects, of this internal principle, and the structure of the human body, as well as of the material universe. Brutes appear to have the same internal principle of perception that we have, but they have never made our progress. There may be other conscious beings in existence who possess the most essential advantages over us.

It may be worthy of remark, that the support the system of optimism derives from the doctrine of necessity, is of a very equivocal nature. The doctrine of necessity teaches, that each event is the only thing, under the circumstances, that could happen; it would, of consequence, be as proper, upon this system, to say that every thing that happens, is the worst, as that it is the best, that could possibly happen.

It



It was observed in the commencement of this discussion upon the subject of optimism, that, though there is some pain, or absolute evil, which, relatively taken, must be admitted to be attended with an overbalance of good; yet it is a matter of great delicacy and difficulty, in most instances, to decide in favour of pain, which, whatever be its relative value, is certainly a negative quantity to be deducted in the sum total of happiness. There is perhaps some impropriety in the phrase, thus applied, of relative good. Pain, under the most favourable circumstances, must be admitted to be absolutely, though not relatively, an evil. In every instance of this kind we are reduced to a choice of evils: consequently, whichever way we determine our election, it is still evil that we choose.

Taking these considerations along with us, the rashness of the optimist will appear particularly glaring, while we recollect the vast portion of pain and calamity that is to be found in the world. Let us not amuse ourselves with a pompous and delusive survey of the whole, but let us examine parts severally and individually. All nature swarms with life. This may, in one view, afford an idea of an extensive theatre of pleasure. But unfortunately every animal preys upon his fellow. Every animal, however minute, has a curious and subtle structure, rendering him susceptible, as it should seem, of piercing anguish. We cannot move our foot, without becoming the means of destruction.

Condition of  
the universe  
displayed.



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CHAP. XI.

The wounds inflicted are of a hundred kinds. These petty animals are capable of palpitating for days in the agonies of death. It may be said, with little licence of phraseology, that all nature suffers. There is no day nor hour, in which, in some regions of the many-peopled globe, thousands of men, and millions of animals, are not tortured, to the utmost extent that organised life will afford. Let us turn our attention to our own species. Let us survey the poor; oppressed, hungry, naked, denied all the gratifications of life, and all that nourishes the mind. They are either tormented with the injustice, or chilled into lethargy. Let us view man, writhing under the pangs of disease, or the fiercer tortures that are stored up for him by his brethren. Who is there that will look on, and say, "All this is well; there is no evil in the world?" Let us recollect the pains of the mind; the loss of friends, the rankling tooth of ingratitude, the unrelenting rage of tyranny, the slow progress of justice, the brave and honest consigned to the fate of guilt. Let us plunge into the depth of dungeons. Let us observe youth languishing in hopeless despair, and talents and virtue shrouded in eternal oblivion. The evil does not consist merely in the pain endured. It is the injustice that inflicts it, that gives it its sharpest sting. Malignity, an unfeeling disposition, vengeance and cruelty, are inmates of every climate. As these are felt by the sufferer with peculiar acuteness, so they propagate themselves. Severity begets severity,  
and



and hatred engenders hate\*. The whole history of the human species, taken in one point of view, appears a vast abortion. Man seems adapted for wisdom and fortitude and benevolence. But he has always, through a vast majority of countries, been the victim of ignorance and superstition. Contemplate the physiognomy of the species. Observe the traces of stupidity, of low cunning, of rooted insolence, of withered hope, and narrow selfishness, where the characters of wisdom, independence and disinterestedness, might have been inscribed. Recollect the horrors of war, that last invention of deliberate profligacy for the misery of man. Think of the variety of wounds, the multiplication of anguish, the desolation of countries, towns destroyed, harvests flaming, inhabitants perishing by thousands of hunger and cold.

A sound philosophy will teach us to contemplate this scene without madness. Instructed in its lessons, we shall remember that, though there is much of evil, there is also much of good in the world, much pleasure, as well as much pain. We shall not even pronounce that some small portion of this evil is not relatively not an evil. Above all, we shall be cheered with the thought of brighter prospects and happier times. But the optimist must be particularly rash, who takes upon him to affirm of all this mass of evil without exception, that it is relatively not evil, and that nothing could have

\* Chap. II, p. 271.

happened



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Ill effects of  
optimism.

It is destruc-  
tive of any  
consistent  
theory of  
virtue :

happened otherwise than it has happened, without the total being worse than it is.

There is reason to think that the creed of optimism, or an opinion bearing some relation to that creed, has done much harm in the world.

It is calculated to overturn all distinction between virtue and vice. The essential part of these ideas, as has been already observed, consists in the tendency of the actions so denominated with respect to the general good \*. But, according to the doctrine of optimism, if I do a virtuous action, I contribute to the general good ; and, if I do a vicious action, it is still the same. Every man, according to this system, is privileged, as the elect are privileged according to the system of certain religionists: "he may live as he list, for he cannot commit sin." Whether I murder my benefactor, or preserve him from being murdered by another, I still do the very best thing that could have been done or thought of.

It will be admitted on all hands, that the conduct of a man may be such, as to produce evil and pain to himself, to involve him in perpetual obloquy and remorse. It may be such, as to inflict intolerable pain, and the most horrible mischief, upon another, or upon many others. A man therefore, upon this scheme, may reasonably study his own interest ; he may study the benefit and advantage of his friends or his neighbours. But, if he affect to study the good of the whole, he is only deceiving himself.

\* Book II, Chap. IV.



It is impossible for him to have the slightest notion, what acts of an individual, under any given circumstances, will or will not contribute to the general good. Nero, when he pronounced sentence upon Lucan or Seneca, when he castrated Sporus, set fire to the city of Rome, or, inclosing the Christians in cloth of pitch, burned them by night after the manner of torches, adopted the conduct, though perhaps he was not aware of it, most aptly conducing to the happiness of the whole. It is not indeed, absolutely speaking, indifferent what I shall do; but, practically speaking, it is, since I am wholly unable to conjecture what will be beneficial or what injurious. We saw, upon the system of self-love, public utility resulting from each man's determining to postpone that utility to his private advantage\*: but it is much more absurd and repulsive to suppose universal happiness to be essentially promoted by the profligacy, malevolence and misery of innumerable multitudes.

But, though optimism, pursued into its consequences, is destructive of the distinction between virtue and vice, or rather teaches that there neither is nor can be such a thing as vice, yet it is the fate of this, like many other errors, that the truths which lie undeveloped in the mind, and cannot be deracinated, serve to check its influence and counteract its evil tendency.

It may however be suspected that, while its per-

blunts the  
delicacy of

\* Chap. X, p. 434.

nicious



BOOK IV.  
CHAP. XI.moral dis-  
crimina-  
tion :

nicious effects are thus counteracted, they are not destroyed. It is unavoidable, that men should, in some respects, imitate, what they persuade themselves is right. Thus in religion, those persons who believe that a large portion of mankind, are objects of God's wrath, and reserved for eternal perdition, can never be prevailed on to regard, with a true and genuine sympathy, those whom God has cursed. In the same manner it will probably happen in the present case : those who believe that all the unfortunate events and sufferings that exist in the world, will be found, in some mysterious way, to have been the fittest instruments of universal good, are in danger of being less scrupulous than they ought to be, in the means they shall themselves select for the accomplishment of their purposes. If pain, horrors and devastation be frequently found means of kindness in the system of the universe, it is impossible to assign a good reason why they should not be such under the direction of man.

reconciles  
us to the  
spectacle of  
perverseness  
in others.

There is another crude notion diffused in the world, which the principle of optimism is calculated to encourage, and which the views here explained have a tendency to correct. It is not uncommon to congratulate ourselves upon the perverseness and misconduct of those whose views we oppose, under the imagination that such misconduct conduces to the more speedy subversion of error and establishment of justice. But the maxim is safer and better founded than this, which should instruct



instruct us that we “rejoice not in evil, but rejoice in the truth.” It has already appeared, that it is a matter of great delicacy and difficulty, to decide in favour of pain and calamity, as the probable means of a preponderance of good. It was sufficiently seen, when we treated of resistance and revolutions, that the angry passions are not the most promising instruments of human happiness. A perverse conduct tends to the production of confusion and violence. A government that employed every species of persecution against those who should desire its reform, and that involved the country over which it presided in war, for the purpose of checking or exterminating sentiments of reason and equality, would do harm, and not good. It might indeed defeat its own purposes; but it would produce resentment and contention. It might excite a revulsion in the public mind against its designs; but this revulsion would be the offspring of irritation, and not of the understanding. Diminish the irritation, and the progress of real knowledge would be more substantial and salutary. Real knowledge is benevolent, not cruel and retaliating. The change that grows up among any people from a calm conviction of the absurdity of their former errors, is of the most admirable sort; but the change that grows from distress, distemper and crisis, is an explosion pregnant with fate to thousands. From all these considerations it appears, that every departure from enormous vice, should  
be



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be accounted as so much gained to the cause of general happiness.

Let any person who entertains the contrary opinion, ask himself, whether, if he had a part in the government we have supposed, he would think himself obliged to act, in the manner in which he professes to desire the government should act? If, as he imagines, that action be most conducive to the public good, most undoubtedly, were it his own case, he ought to adopt it. Again, would he advise or incite the government, in any way, to this perverse conduct? There cannot be a clearer principle in morals, than “that the action it would be vice in us to adopt, it is vice in us to desire to see adopted by another.”

Of persecu-  
tion.

A further consequence that flows from these speculations, is relative to the persecution and sufferings to be endured by the advocates of justice. The same reasoning that has persuaded men to rejoice in beholding acts of oppression, has led them to court oppression and martyrdom. A sound philosophy, it should seem, would never instigate us to provoke the passions of others, or to regard injustice as the suitable means of public happiness. It is reason, and not anger, that will benefit mankind. Dispassionate enquiry, not bitterness and resentment, is the parent of reform. The wise man will avoid persecution, because a protracted life, and an unfettered liberty, are likely to enable him to produce a greater sum of good. He will avoid  
persecution,



persecution, because he will be unwilling to add fuel to the flames of contention. He will regret it when it arrives, because he believes it to be both wicked and mischievous. But he will not avoid it by the sacrifice of a virtuous, but tempered, activity. He will not regret it with a mean and pusillanimous spirit, but will meet it, when it can no longer be prevented, with that dignity of soul and tranquillity of temper that are characteristic of true wisdom. He will not imagine, that the cause of truth will perish, though he should be destroyed. He will make the best of the situation to which he is reduced, and endeavour that his death, like his life, may be of use to mankind.

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Godwin







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